University of Alberta

A Joker in the Classroom

A Qualitative Research Inquiry into the Essences of the Joker Role in Mirror Theatre and Their Correlation to Reflective Teaching Practice

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

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ABSTRACT

In this qualitative research inquiry, David H. K. Berezan, graduate student in the Faculty of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta, juxtaposes the educative techniques and approaches engaged by the Joker in Mirror Theatre, a Theatre in Education company, with his own teaching practice to reflect upon what helps teaching work and why. His research question is, *what are the essences of jokering in Mirror Theatre and how do these essences inform, reinforce, correlate, engage and contribute to reflective teaching practice?* By looking into and through the mirror established by the Joker of Mirror Theatre, David Berezan explores and discovers 18 essences of Jokering that illustrate pedagogical links between jokering and teaching and he offers his thesis as a reflective medium through which the efficacy of teaching practice can be explored and contemplated. The author came to understand that in his own teaching practice he is *a Joker in the classroom.*

DEDICATION

For Mary Jane, my soul mate and Dellice, my soul.

PREFACE

I became a member of the Mirror Theatre, a professional Theatre In Education (TIE) company, in October 2000. I was immediately thrust into the Mirror Theatre process; invigorating and rapid-fire rehearsals and soon after, a dynamic performance of the show *Coulda/Shoulda*, at a teacher conference in Edmonton, Alberta. This thrilling synergic whirlwind of theatre activity whisked me away into a performance adventure that at once challenged, informed and reinforced my acting abilities, my improvisational skills and my teaching practice, but I wasn't sure why. I have participated in many shows in my lifetime, both on stage and behind the scenes as actor, singer, drummer, director, emcee, in voice-overs, historical interpreter, designer and technical director. As a teacher in drama, theatre, English language arts and other curricula I've taken students and audiences of all ages through countless performance, theatrical, jocular and educational experiences that many of my students feel compelled to talk about for good or ill, some even decades after the pedagogical nature of our relationships had passed, but I had not ever participated in anything quite like the Mirror Theatre experience. Yet, it was "as if" I'd been involved with Mirror Theatre all my life, or at least, all my teaching life.

Intuitively and experientially I understood the processes, approaches, methods and techniques employed in Mirror Theatre (see Appendix A for the fundamental concepts upon which Mirror Theatre is founded). While rehearsing and performing with this particularly caring company of educator/actors, I felt an affinity with the reflective and socially minded objectives and purposes of the company. I was impressed, inspired and fascinated by the certainty with which Mirror Theatre worked for the audience in dealing with social issues they targeted in a performance and particularly with the role of

Joker. "Mirror Theatre [works when] we look at the mirror and through a series of dramatic analyses we begin to recognize aspects that we [wouldn't] see on our own faces if we hadn't looked at the mirror" (Kamau, 2001, p. 1). I looked into the theatrical *mirror* created by the cast to see the Joker at work and saw my own reflection, not as actor or writer or director, but as educator.

Throughout my career I've applied much thought, care and *elbow grease* to working out *how* to make a lesson work for my students and to developing *what* I could use to make the lesson work, but I had not really deciphered clearly *why* I may or may not be an effective teacher. I've always left that question for my students to answer. The mirror established by the Joker of Mirror Theatre invited me to reflect upon the qualities and essences of my teaching practice and to understand more completely what students find effective in the way I teach. It intrigued me to think that any efficacy in my teaching may be because I am *a Joker in the classroom*. And so, the research began…

PROLOGUE

Underpinning the thesis you're about to read is a conundrum; a conundrum related to "relations of power" (Butin, 2001, p. 6). This thesis juxtaposes the work of a Joker, a teacher and a theatre company all dedicated to the belief that self-reflection and reflective practice in education can have advantageous effects on ways of thinking and being for both the practitioners and participants involved. As will become evident, the Joker I refer to above as a subject of this study was also my graduate studies advisor during the research and data collection phases of this inquiry. The essence of the conundrum lies in part in this feature of the research. How does one deal with issues of authority, influence and power inherent in the relationship between advisor and student? As Foucault rightly points out "power is everywhere" (cited in Butin, 2001, p. 6) and there is no denying that by the very nature of the work an advisor exerts power that influences decisions made by a student. However, I return to Foucault for the answer to this conundrum:

> On the other hand a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements that are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that 'the other' (the one over who power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible interventions open up. (Foucault, 1982a, p. 220)

In other words, for a relation of power to exist in the first place there must be a balance between the power exerted and the ability to resist that power. This is the balance the Joker and I tried very hard to strike and maintain throughout study. The thesis topic

emerged from my own interests and experience and I developed the research design that I employed of my own free will, but the inquiry was obviously influenced by the advice of my advisor. In addition, similar power relations existed between the teacher, the students, the Joker, the actors and the audience participants referred to in the study. At every stage of the inquiry every attempt was made to maintain the kind of balance in power relations that opened up "a whole field of responses, reactions, results and possible interventions" (Foucault, 1982a, p. 220). What I hope is that the acknowledgement of these relations of power is clearly evident in this thesis and that the reader finds the balances struck acceptable.

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INTRODUCTION

Familiarity engenders self-assurance, but it also can foster unsubstantiated conclusions. "Authentic research is where you do not already have [or think you have] the answers" (McNiff, 1998, p. 13). The likeness I saw in the mirror upon reflection was somewhat problematic in that I recognized qualities of my teaching practice; pedagogical, epistemological and intuitive qualities I've spent a lifetime learning, examining and developing. Confidence that grows with knowledge, experience, study and self-assuredness could rapidly move from hypothesis to conviction without the necessary research to validate the qualities of the mirror image I saw. "Those with a mission are less likely to see and are more likely to obscure what they try to describe" (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990, p. 99). However, "the essence of all research originates in curiosity—a desire to find out how and why things happen, including why people do the things they do, as well as whether or not certain ways of doing things work better than other ways" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000, p. 7). That I became cognizant of and curious about the similarities between how I teach and how scenes were *jokered* in Mirror Theatre rehearsals or performances is the very reason I set out on this inquiry into the essences of *jokering* and their correlation to the elements of reflective teaching practice. The recognizable and the familiar, in this instance, intrigued me so much that I felt compelled to step through that looking glass provided by Mirror Theatre to investigate Joker-like qualities that may reflect, inform, influence and inspire my teaching practice. As Wolcott (1982) puts it, "there is merit in openmindedness and willingness to enter a research setting looking for questions as well as answers but it is 'impossible to embark upon

research without some idea of what one is looking for and foolish not to make that quest explicit' (p. 157)" (cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 17).

Explicitly, I saw in the Joker essences I recognized in my own teaching practice and so, I wanted to pursue a study into whether my perception was correct. By placing my teaching practice in juxtaposition with the methods, approaches and *lived experiences* of the Joker of Mirror Theatre I set out to understand heuristically, hermeneutically, ontologically, dialectically, epistemologically and phenomenologically those essential qualities and pedagogical perspectives that help a teacher to engage in self-reflection as a way of questioning or improving upon current practice; to imaginatively navigate the cultural milieu of the classroom with its shiploads of curricular requirements, lesson plans, educational processes, methods and techniques; and to create those moments of clarity when both teacher and students rise above the flotsam and jetsam of apathy, routine and angst to *know* they've learned something together. Therefore, my *research question* is:

What are the essences of jokering in Mirror Theatre and how do these essences inform, reinforce, correlate, engage and contribute to reflective teaching practice?

Chapter 1

Methodology and the Research Design

In deciding upon a methodology for my research into the synergic and catalytic energies of the Joker and the essences of jokering in Mirror Theatre, I found myself drawn, initially, to the work of Max van Manen, scholar in hermeneutic and phenomenological research. van Manen's succinct delineations of phenomenology and concomitant anecdotal descriptions illuminating the processes of phenomenological research seemed to clarify, reinforce and confirm the suitability of phenomenology for my investigations. By its very nature Mirror Theatre is a phenomenological research technique in that it explores qualities of being and phenomena lived by its target audiences. Though we start with the acts of re-creation and enactment as in any theatre setting, Mirror Theatre is further designed to engage people vicariously or directly in their own *lived* or *relived* experiences.

> Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience. To say that same thing differently: phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld—the world as we immediately experience it rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or theorize about it. Phenomenology aims to come to a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. (van Manen, 1984, p. 37)

The issues presented and probed in Mirror Theatre presentations reflect the concerns and wishes of the audiences targeted in the show and are drawn from the experiences of their daily lives. For example, if the central phenomenon at issue is bullying, the participants live through drama the experiences of bullying as bully, bullied or observer.

Phenomenological questions like, *what is the experience of bullying like for both bully and bullied?* and secondarily, *what is it like for a teacher, personally and pedagogically to witness bullying and its effects?* are embraced, explored and elucidated. In addition, "phenomenological research is the attentive practice of thoughtfulness. Indeed, if there is one word that most aptly characterizes phenomenology itself, then this word is 'thoughtfulness—a heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living'" (van Manen, 1984, p. 38). Mirror Theatre can stimulate the intensity of contemplation van Manen suggests and in this "thoughtfulness" people may be transformed, perspectives may change, actions may be modified, life may become more meaningful and if nothing else, they may have a good think or a lot of laughs together. However, phenomenology did not quite provide the all encompassing approach I was looking for in this inquiry because my research differs substantively from the precepts, principles and procedures espoused by Max van Manen and other hermeneutic phenomenologists in three significant ways: I seek *essences* — not *one* essence of a common lived experience, my research will focus on a single subject, the Joker of Mirror Theatre, and though audiences or classes live in a lifeworld of lived experiences, these experiences are constructed in the theatre or classroom rather than observed and analyzed in their "natural state."

Mirror Theatre is a phenomenon experientially in that it provides a creative, collective and synergic experience lived, felt and understood hermeneutically, ontologically and phenomenologically in the moment and at the time. However, every participant in a Mirror Theatre presentation experiences the phenomenon in a very different or only in a similar way, not in the *same* way. When phenomenologists such as Max van Manen set out to discover "that what makes a thing what it is" (van Manen,

1998, p. 177) they are seeking the single essence that delineates and characterizes the phenomenon or lived experience of all participants or, at least, of most. What makes Mirror Theatre work is the collected and collective experiences of the participants as mediated by the Joker. To limit my investigation to a solitary and isolated essence would be, in this case, to deny the interrelatedness and interdependency of human condition and the changeability and malleability of human experience and existence as mediated in the moment by the Joker of Mirror Theatre.

In design Mirror Theatre is a research methodology and a framework within which all five qualitative research traditions proposed by Creswell (1998) can be explored: case study, ethnography, biography, ground theory and of course, phenomenology. Researched case studies into events, activities or individual experiences or biographical narratives from the actors, the audiences and the public at large become the basis for scenes in Mirror Theatre presentations. While elucidating, exposing, examining, evaluating and edifying their own attitudes and behaviours during the show/workshop, the participants (actors, Joker and audience) live, relive, recapture and relate experiences and feelings that become essential in collecting data for a phenomenological study, and by returning to the field again and again in subsequent shows, theories grounded in the dramatic, emotional, jocular and experiences of hundreds of participants have evolved like: *drama is depth efficient, not time efficient* or *all of us use, misuse and abuse power (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May 9, 2002),* or *knowing that such work floats fragilely on a delicate layer of trust, the final role of the Joker is that of curtain* (Norris, 1993, p. 18). An ethnographical profile of a particular target audience, young or older, is ascertained before Mirror Theatre moves into a

conference, a work place or school and the cultural ethos of that group is further studied and represented through mimetic performances of scenes that reflect the concerns or issues experienced by the group. Naturally I was headed toward a qualitative inquiry, but I wasn't quite there yet.

"For me, the potential of drama as research is fully realized, not when one translates data into a play, but when the dramatic activities shape the presentation in the same way as quantitative research uses numerical data through all stages. Drama becomes a complete research activity when data is collected, analyzed and presented in dramatic fashion" (Norris, 2000, pp. 40–51). Therein lies the answer. Mirror Theatre itself became the methodological vehicle driving my research and the drama, with its multiplicity of constituent art forms and qualities, the artistic medium through which the data would be collected for my qualitative inquiry.

Fundamental to each presentation by Mirror Theatre is the concept of the contemplative mirror created in the imaginations of the participants by the actors and the Joker. The principle focus of the company is to draw the participants into the mirror where they see themselves reflected in the scenes presented and through which they have the opportunity to explore and contemplate the behavioural and social natures of their lives. As a researcher I found I could use the imagery of the mirror to observe the Joker at work and to reflect upon my own professional practice as Joker and teacher. In recent years I've been particularly drawn to Schon's conceptualization of the "reflective practitioner" who reflects upon the effectiveness of her practice after teaching, "reflection *on* action," or while teaching, "reflection *in* action" (Schon, 1987, p. 26). I find the continuous evolution of one's teaching practice through introspection, observation,

reflection and deconstruction a tremendous asset in the development of one's professional practice and in reshaping lessons before, after and while teaching. Conceptualizing and engaging the mirror in Mirror Theatre provided the psychological, educational, reflective and explorative space to conduct this inquiry and to reach for that personal and professional growth that may offer insights or enrichment or ideas or ideals for a reflective teaching practice. In illuminating, engendering, examining and investigating the essential qualities I wished to study, Mirror Theatre became the qualitative methodology of my inquiry—based in an art form, but not *arts-based* in that drama or theatre would neither be the focus of the study nor the means by which the data would be disseminated. I didn't know where I was going nor what I'd find out exactly, but I knew that belief in the reflective capacities of the mirror could get me there.

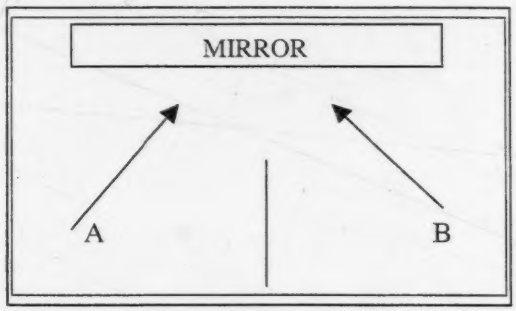
The Joker

In Mirror Theatre the audience is invited to participate in the rewriting and re-staging of the scenes presented by the cast so they might probe issues of concern to them. The theatre troupe acts as a *mirror* in which people can see reflected, themselves, others they know and issues with which they are familiar. The scenes are presented at first as a theatre piece and "when the skit is over, the participants are asked [by the Joker] if they agree with the solution presented. At least some will say no" (Boal, 1979, p. 139). At this point the Joker invites the audience members into a discussion of what they have just witnessed and of what they might do differently with the characters, or the staging, or the approach to the scene that would better illustrate the complexity of the issue. "It is explained that the scene will be performed once more, exactly as it was the first time. But

now any participant in the audience has the right to replace any actor and lead the action in the direction that seems to him most appropriate" (Boal, p. 139). People step safely and comfortably through the looking glass into a space where they become more cognizant of and perhaps, offer possible solutions to, the issues, situations and complications encountered and recalled while playing out the scenes. Through this process, phenomena such as bullying, harassment, rules of fair play, feelings of inadequacy and what is funny and what isn't can be presented, explored, experienced and even re-experienced through the collective efforts of the actors, audience and the Joker.

"Mirror Theatre does not want or desire an open forum on what is wrong with a particular environment. Rather it aims to have a discussion about the issue in general using the particulars of the scene" (T. Joker, Personal Communication, September 15, 2003). The scene or series of scenes presented by the actors and the Joker in the staging area create a theatrical mirror effect by reflecting allusively the quotidian experiences of the audience. The scenes are developed from extensive research conducted by members of Mirror Theatre into the daily encounters and the concerns of the target audience. Whatever the phenomenon in question, the participants with the help of the Joker are given the opportunity to observe, think, rethink, rework, explore and reflect upon the implications of a particular behaviour such as bullying or being excluded. However, "Mirror Theatre goes beyond reflecting the issues the audience members may face in the realistic or metaphorical scenes. Their rethinking in an open conversation isn't about themselves but rather, the scene. The scene is what is reworked" (T. Joker, Personal Communication, September 15, 2003). The mirror effect draws the attentions of the

participants toward the staging area, the actors and the Joker rather than toward each other. Imagine two people on two sides of a wall with a mirror at the open end.



Both parties cannot see each other, but they can see each other's reflection, indirectly. "Audience members get to hear what their peers think about the issue and can extrapolate to their own reality, but the conversation is never about them [directly]. They are given an opportunity to rethink, rework and explore, *in the mirror*" (T. Joker, Personal Communication, September 15, 2003).

Augusto Boal was the innovator who defined and validated the function of "Joker" in theatre using the term to signify and identify the player who is both in and out of the performance and who functions as observer, spectator, actor and moderator. "All the theatrical possibilities are conferred upon the 'Joker' function: [who] is magical, omniscient, polymorphous and ubiquitous. On stage [the joker] functions as a master of ceremonies, *raisonneur, kurogo,* etc." (Boal, 1979 , p. 74). The Joker engages the audience in a discussion and exploration of the scenes and issues presented and then invites them to participate in a dramatic process defined by Boal as "simultaneous dramaturgy" by rewriting, reenacting and replaying the scenes. The Joker stops the performance and asks the audience to offer solutions, and "the audience has the right to

intervene, to correct the actions or words of the actors, who are obligated to comply strictly with these instructions from the audience. Thus while the audience 'writes' the work the actors perform it simultaneously. All solutions, suggestions, and opinions are revealed in theatrical form" (pp. 131–132).

The Joker would not presume to enter people's lives theatrically or socially and demand they change fundamental characteristics of their existence. "I don't want to force, I want to invite" (Norris, 1995, p. 284). The Joker attempts to energize, stimulate, encourage and facilitate the self-discovery and open discussion about challenging and complex social issues in an attempt to draw audience members willingly and comfortably from their seats onto the stage. Rapport is established and trust engendered with the audience so that they can enter into thoughtful, sociable, entertaining, mutually enjoyable and reflective conversations. The conversation generated amongst the participants about the issue as stimulated by the actors, mediated by the Joker and "processed through the mirror" (T. Joker, Personal Communication, September 15, 2003) never becomes confrontational or argumentative or blame-oriented. "Only with trust and acceptance can significant conversations and meaning take place" (Norris, 1999, p. 235). There is not the pressure to engage in anything more than the conversation. The collective and constructivist work of Joker, audience and actors tends to be more subtle, intangible, even nebulous at times; in effect, more like the long term impacts that evolve in people's lives, which were initiated by a teacher or teachers in their distant past—influences they were quite unaware of at the time.

Three other very important aspects of the jokering in Mirror Theatre are the Joker's emphases on *play* and a sense of humour and the obligation the Joker feels

toward the needs of the audience. The Joker instructs, inspires and reminds the actors to play as children play, spontaneously and improvisationally, without inhibitions, provisos, exclusive rules or the baggage that sometimes comes with an actor from previous theatre experience and training and believes "play shows a desire to experiment, to be creative and innovative" (Norris, 1993, p. 1). There cannot be any pedantic intentions or preconceived notions about the audience's response or the outcomes that may result from their experience of the drama or the direction the "play" or "inter-play" will take in performance.

"Humour is a matter of style, and I have found that my use of humour and willingness to laugh at myself in my role, helps to loosen up an audience and create a playful tone" (Norris, 2002, p. 8). The Joker enters the staging area with a colourful Joker's hat on replete with tinkling bells and a spray of pointy extremities. Already the ice is broken and the edge is taken off the psychological barriers audiences often feel in an intimate theatre setting. Though the audience is usually filled with strangers, the Joker invites them to join in, to talk, to share experiences, to participate, even to act as if they were all friends. Laughter accompanies the Joker's invitation and the audience senses the trust engendered. With humour and a reverent sense of respect for the audience, the Joker of Mirror Theatre transcends the psychological barrier of the invisible fourth wall to facilitate discussion and then draw the participants, on stage and off, into an improvised adventure with no predetermined outcome or specific resolution in mind.

"Mirror theatre is never about the actors!" (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May 17, 2002). Actors who possess an attitude of "can do" and are completely, utterly and absolutely committed to the needs of the audience, irrespective of their own

ambitions and desires, learn most about themselves and others through their Mirror Theatre performances and often feel they have, in some small way, engaged members of the audiences in a process so they might make a difference in their own lives. The voices of the actor-educators and of the Joker must be and are heard as part of the writing, rehearsal and presentation processes involved in Mirror Theatre; but the intent of these voices is to speak with the needs of the audience in mind, heart and soul. The voices of the audience are paramount and the Joker tries to *stretch* these voices by encouraging new meanings that might transform understanding or experience to emerge through the drama. *Insightful voices* are heard from participants that influence the scenes presented, as they are *workshopped*, rewritten and replayed by the audience. "Play as free improvisation sharpens our capacity to deal with a changing world" (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 45) and to deal with the needs of the audience members as they evolve in the ruminative and reflexive project intended by Mirror Theatre.

One other essential theme inhabiting the Joker's philosophic bearing and leadership is the political nature of his work. There are Jokers from other companies who believe Boal's precept "jokers personally decide nothing" (Boal, 1992, p. 235). A Joker, or anyone for that matter, involved in human interactions and interrelationships could not ever be completely non-political. As Jackson indicates every action, every change of direction, every question, answer and suggestion in the interplay with the audience involves choice. In other words, the Joker has the power to choose the direction of the play. "Anyone who talks about the Joker being a neutral person, I think is very delusional because [as] the Joker, anytime I ask a question [I've] made a choice" (Kamau, 2001, p. 6). In any given audience there may be so many suggestions from the audience a Joker

can't get to them all, a direction an audience member may wish to take the play may require caution, sensitivity to the readiness level of audience members reluctant to participate might dictate a different approach or technique and an enthused audience or an apathetic one often command spontaneous changes in pace, timing or length of performance. All of these scenarios and many others of the like require the attentions and skills of the Joker and all demand that the Joker use his powers of persuasion and selection, carefully and considerately, in making decisions about where to take the audience next.

> The Joker walks a fine line between accepting the audience's ideas and challenging them to think further. It requires quick thinking and decision-making skills. The Joker accepts offers from an audience and reshapes them into pedagogical moments by asking further in-depth questions and using audience comments to create new scenes for the actors to try out on stage. (Norris, 2002, p. 3)

The Joker has the best interests of the audience members at heart and enters open-ended and open-minded conversations with them about issues of concern that facilitate collective problem-solving and decision-making for all involved, including the Joker. "Dialogue cannot exist… in the absence of a profound love for the world and for the people" (Friere, 2000, p. 89). The Joker makes decisions cognizant of the responsibility for the welfare of the participants.

Many audience members, young and older, over the years have felt compelled to inform the company after a show of the immediate, powerful and sometimes epiphanous effects the Mirror Theatre experience has had on them, but whatever change in action,

thought or deed that might occur as a result is seen and treated by the Joker and the actors as a private and personal matter, with public or social ramifications certainly, but left to grow, echo and resonate in the hearts, minds and souls of the participants. We want Mirror Theatre to *haunt* the audience beyond the theatre, to keep the experiences, thoughts and ideas rolling around in their imaginations and their psyches for a longer period of time as they face the trials, tribulations and triumphs arising in their own lives. But does the experience of a Mirror Theatre presentation "haunt" the participants beyond the ephemeral glow of the theatre? The private nature of any significant change that may occur in the lives of participants due to the interventions of the Joker begs credibility of the Mirror Theatre's claim that drama is "a powerful learning medium and instrument of social change" (Appendix A). Social change occurs through collective action taken by people working to resolve the issues or injustices that plague their lives. But where is the measure of Mirror Theatre's influence in this evolutionary process, even within its limited field of operations? After the company packs up and has left a school where Mirror Theatre has spent an entire week, did the participants take seriously anything the Joker, the actors and especially the other participants suggested they consider or contemplate in their future interactions with each other? One does not know, for sure. Unless, some length of time after the event, a participant comes back to say that time with Mirror Theatre experience was a life-altering experience in some way, one cannot assume the degree to which Mirror Theatre contributes to social change. I've read numerous glowing reviews, letters of thanks and commendation, notes from participants written from the heart, and complimentary accounts from organizers and socially-minded institutions of government and education addressed to Mirror Theatre, but most of these

accolades arrive on the day or shortly after the event and, of course, not all or even the vast majority of participants respond to their experiences in words. Productive social change is characterized by the continuity and longevity of its effect long after the fact. However, to be fair, Mirror Theatre claims social change as its driving force, not its guarantee and as teachers continue to teach without the benefit of time travel into the futures of their students, the Joker continues jokering in the hope of affecting positively, if only minutely, the social interactions and relationships amongst participants. The Joker desires to "eliminate needless pain on the planet," (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May17, 2002) but walks out of the looking glass after the presentation of scenes with a realist's humility to act as a catalyst between the audience and the performers and to play the experienced advisor, the devil's advocate, the gracious host, the friendly moderator, the informed shaman and the trickster cracking jokes all at one and the same time, knowing only that the work of Mirror Theatre is in high demand.

There are numerous other Jokers in Theatre in Education companies around the world who also believe in drama as a transforming medium and I've observed a number of them, both male and female, at work. The Joker's work is influenced and informed by the work of every other Joker in the field. They share an intercollegiate, academic and professional relationship as practitioners, so, in reflection upon my studies of jokering in Mirror Theatre and by way of summation I enter into the record here, one of the best descriptions of the Joker role I've come across. Tony Jackson—Joker, scholar and practitioner in Theatre in Education—describes the role of Joker as:

> ...particularly exacting. In the first place the Joker must make the aims and procedures of the Forum clear, and then set the process in motion. At all times

> she must be responsive to the desires of the spectators, listening extremely carefully and enabling them, individually and collectively, to pursue their journey of exploration, without imposing the wishes of the company upon them. At the same time, choices have to be made: not all interventions are equally productive and not all suggestions can be pursued. The Joker has to judge when to move from one line of enquiry to another, when to stop pursuing one action and its consequences and allow someone else to open up a new possibility: she must keep the audience focused on the central problems, select the appropriate questions to further the dramatic debate, support the spectators and the actors, challenge the spectators, know when to listen, when to speak and when to insist on action ('Don't tell me, show me!'). At all times the Joker must transmit energy, excitement and enthusiasm for tackling the problems, combined with genuine interest in all the contributions from the audience. But above all else, the Joker must carry the overall responsibility for structuring and deepening the learning experience as it is unfolding. (Jackson, 1993, p. 118)

I recognize Jackson's philosophic delineation as fundamental to jokering I observed in Mirror Theatre, but what is particularly apropos and fascinating in Jackson's description of a Joker are the key words italicized above. These words are part of the lexicon of professional discourse amongst teachers. Recently, in consultation with students I've set target grades for one of my senior drama classes. The "aim" of target grades, for good or ill, is to establish a mindset amongst students of constant vigilance in their studies. The problem with target grades is that they are often as limiting as they are inspiring. To be effective, target grades require an earnest evidentiary process of evaluation based on a

record of previous work and assessment. Discussing with students their strengths is not difficult, but dealing with their weaknesses realistically without discouraging their work is "exacting" to say the least. "Listening" to a student's self-assessment and arriving at a mutually agreed upon target grade without "imposing" a preconceived teacher grade is essential to maintaining a student's "responsiveness" to the coursework. Students must feel a degree of control in their success through their "journey of exploration" in the course and the teacher's "excitement," "genuine interest," "support" and "enthusiasm" in and for their work are essential components in the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. During each consultation I had the "overall responsibility" to make "choices" regarding the direction of our conversation, "select" and ask "appropriate questions" to "challenge" the students' perceptions, know when "to move on" and at the same time remain "focussed" on the students' needs, abilities and goals. As for any teaching moment, setting target grades must "deepen the learning experience" not stifle good will and creative "energy." In essence, during this evaluative process I jokered each conversation I had with students. I didn't teach them about target grades or about how to carry out an evaluation or even about the syllabus assessment criteria. In our consultations they learned something about all these things, but such information was secondary to a careful assessment of their work to date and to setting target grades mutually decided upon between teacher and students. Jokering and teaching certainly share a similar pedagogical genesis.

Data Collection Methods

In studying the essences of jokering and how these essences might inform, reinforce, correlate, engage and contribute to a reflective teaching practice, I felt, as part of the juxtaposition of my teaching practice with the jokering in Mirror Theatre, I must examine and experience the lifeworld of the Joker from both sides of the mirror by playing the Joker myself and as the observer of the Joker in action. "The researcher can best come to know the reality of a situation by being there: by becoming immersed in the stream of events and activities, by becoming part of the phenomenon of study, and by documenting the understanding of the situation by those engaged in it"(Hathaway, 1995, p. 544). This inquiry draws upon three major methods of data collection: electronic recordings and transcriptions that capture the qualities, essences and themes under study; personal experience as an "instrument" of the inquiry; and techniques of the art, in this case drama, that form the basis of the inquiry. These methods crossed over throughout the data collection process and were utilized in combination rather than as distinct, separable approaches.

Data collection for my thesis began on April 10th, 2002 when Mirror Theatre, with a cast under my direction, performed *In-Between* for a Faculty of Secondary Education graduate class at the University of Alberta in which I played the Joker. I introduced the show as Joker with:

> *In-Between* is performed metaphorically. This play deals with issues of race, culture and gender in various combinations throughout the play. In these kinds of issues people find themselves in-between: in-between choices, in-between groups of people, in-between relationships in all aspects of their lives. You'll also see something that Mirror Theatre [converses about] a lot, the abuses of power that

> people [partake in]... often unaware of the power that we possess and innocently going about our business [not realizing] how it affects others. All scenes are researched. We've gotten these ideas from real-life situations, news reports, in a whole variety of ways. (D. Berezan, Personal Communication, April 10, 2002)

The cast and I wrote this show for an ethnically based youth group involved in a "resorting to non-violence" project. In this part of the research I focused on my experiences as Joker to gain insight and a greater understanding of the essences of jokering in Mirror theatre.

> If we put ourselves in someone else's shoes, for example, then we become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person—by putting *ourselves* in his position. Transposing ourselves consists neither in the empathy of one individual for another nor in subordinating another person to our own standards; rather, it always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other. (Gadamer, 1999, p. 305)

This performance of *In-Between* was electronically recorded and transcribed into manuscript form, which became the initial data collection of this study.

Between May 6th and 10th, 2002 I set out on the second phase of data collection for my research. I was on tour with Mirror Theatre to a school in central Alberta, this time as researcher and co-Joker. On this tour there were two shows: *Coulda/Shoulda* designed for junior and senior high students and *Fair Play Rulz* designed for upper elementary. *Coulda/Shoulda* takes a provocative stand asking audience members what could/should be done to make the scenes presented better. The show in some ways could be considered "The Best of Mirror Theatre," as it is, in part, a compilation of scenes from

other shows. Sections of this show appear in the Alberta Teachers' Association *Safe and Caring Schools Program* video on bullying and conflict resolution. *Fair Play Rulz* was written originally for the Edmonton Fringe Festival, *A Fringe Odyssey 2001*. The play entertains while challenging children ages nine through twelve and their carers to consider whether rules created or followed on the playground are fair or not. Children are blessed with a very natural and strong sense of fair play. Unfortunately, fairness is relative and children (adults too for that matter) don't always *sense* fairness in the same way or at the same time. They all seem to know when something is not fair whether perpetrated by other children or an adult, but they don't really know what or whether to do anything about the perceived injustice. During this weeklong journey through this phase of my qualitative research design, I spent most of my time behind the video camera, audio taping interviews with the Joker, and the cast, furiously writing field notes and I also worked one performance of *Coulda/Shoulda* as the Joker. The data recorded on video and audiocassette was then transcribed into data rich manuscript so that the electronic recordings could be destroyed.

"Writers agree that one undertakes qualitative research in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language" (Creswell, 1998, p. 14). I was an instrument in my own inquiry as a member of Mirror Theatre, performer, researcher and Joker. By living the Joker role and analyzing the experience and the transcription of the video coverage of my performance I accumulated comparative data that I could juxtapose with the data I accumulated from observations, field notes and video transcriptions of the

Joker of Mirror Theatre. From the other side of the mirror as observer and researcher, I accumulated data by video recording and transcribing into manuscript a dress rehearsal, seven performances, one of the pre-show briefings and two of the post-show debriefing sessions, individual interviews with the six cast members and five interviews with the Joker of Mirror Theatre.

"Qualitative researchers usually work with *small* samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth—unlike quantitative researchers, who aim for larger numbers of context-stripped cases and seek statistical significance" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 27). There were six Mirror Theatre cast members and two Jokers involved in my inquiry. Each of us is a teacher in professional practice, in training or in job description and each of us has a vested interest in the educational values of Mirror Theatre experience. Though I presented each cast member with a list of questions we might start with and they had their opportunities to select from the topics the questions posed to get them started, all preferred the conversational approach so characteristic of Mirror Theatre. Let's just talk about the subject and about what the research seeks to uncover and understand in a more insightful way. Interviews with the cast and with the Joker were conducted at different times and on different days to take advantage of the variance in experiential understanding, perceptions and perspectives that evolved for them during the week of performances and workshops.

Further data was drawn from analyzing the techniques of drama, the art that forms the basis of my inquiry, as employed by the Joker while working an audience. "The arts and the humanities have provided a long tradition of ways of describing, interpreting, and appraising the world: History, art, literature, dance, drama, poetry, and music are among

the most important forms through which humans have represented and shaped their experience" (Eisner, 1998, p. 2). Drama is macrocosmic in its assemblage of art forms. An amalgam of language, singing, design, painting, creative movement, dancing, improvisation, playing, acting, direction and many other artistic endeavours constitutes each Mirror Theatre presentation and characteristic of drama experience both in the theatre and in the classroom. Therefore, I had to choose a methodology for my inquiry that resonated with the same multifaceted and aesthetically complex artistic approach. In its approaches, format, technical production, performance and workshop methods Mirror Theatre is arts based research in progress and in action. The lived and relived experiences are multi-layered, multifaceted and multitudinous in the design of Mirror Theatre presentation. In just one Mirror Theatre performance and workshop I can explore my own experiences as actor, teacher, researcher and Joker; all actor-educators participating as cast members in a Mirror Theatre presentation have had time to reflect upon their artistic and professional practices and approaches; Mirror Theatre, with the help of the audience, collects data for research projects and for scenes to be modified or added to the show; and all participants have had the chance to *re-search*, consider, discover and rethink their behaviour as well as the politics and the social implications of issues dealt with in the show.

> Inherent in the practice of the professional we recognize as unusually competent is a core of artistry. Artistry is an exercise of intelligence, a kind of knowing, though different in crucial respects from our standard model of professional knowledge. It is not inherently mysterious; it is rigorous in its own terms; and we can learn a great deal about it—within what limits, we should treat as an open

> question—by carefully studying the performance of unusually competent performers. (Schon, 1987, p. 13)

The art form itself, drama, is a rich source of all sorts of data. The breadth and depth of possibilities for research and for data collection and analysis are endless, and could be limitless if the research project is not contained within manageable parameters. "Knowing what you want to find out, at least initially, leads inexorably to the question of how you will get that information. That question, in turn, constrains the analyses you can do. Note that the term *instrumentation* may mean little more than some shorthand devices for observing and recording events—devices that come from initial conceptualizations loose enough to be reconfigured readily as the data suggest revisions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 34). In this inquiry I focused on those data that were potentially revealing in relating, analyzing and juxtaposing jokering and teaching in the classroom.

The Joker uses a variety of drama and theatre techniques, skills and structure to help the audience through their journey of discovery. To understand and interpret the data I was collecting, I had to be clear on what the Joker was up to in each moment of the performance. Therefore, the actions of the Joker become instruments in the inquiry. The Theatre in Education tools utilized by the Joker while working the audience included drama and theatre conventions, providing a language the audience could use to interpret their reflective experiences, Brechtian devices and conversational approaches.

During performance a variety of drama and theatre conventions are used to engage the audience in the exploration of the issues contained within performance. Not all may or even can be applied in every performance. The Joker makes choices that are appropriate to the needs of the audience at any given time. Conventions that the Joker

uses include *the remote control,*[1] *simulations, still-image, overheard conversations, voices in the head, teacher-in-role, cross-cutting, flashback, montage, play within the play, gestalt, group sculpture, marking the moment, if it was you, narration, hot-seating*[2]*, out-scenes, fly on the wall, devil/angel, tug-of-war, inner dialogue, inner thoughts, thoughts in the head, Joker mobility,*[3] *lighting* and *paraphrasing*. Defining each convention is not the purpose or purview this thesis, but a couple of examples may suffice to illustrate how drama and theatre conventions are used in jokering. An example of *inner thoughts* occurs when the Joker freezes the action and asks an actor or audience participant who has taken on a role to tell the audience her thoughts about the situation she is acting out—thoughts or subtext that might not be expressed in the dialogue of the characters involved in the scene. The convention, *play within the play*, occurs when a scene seemingly in the background of the play is brought forward to centre stage. Characters in this "background" scene may be pointing to relevant and revealing aspects of an issue in their acting that would otherwise dissipate into the picturization of the scene as it moves forward or into the set dressing. Each convention offers a way or ways to explore the issue at hand and to keep the audience involved in the kind of personal reflection that may result in social change. "Creative drama, then, is a tool to take us beyond the constraints of our own limited perspective by providing us with not only a tool to look differently, but an attitude through which diversity is valued and celebrated.

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[1] In *Fair Play Rulz*, the Joker tried an imaginary TV remote control to stop and start the action. TV kids understand remote controls and it *worked a treat* in maintaining the integrity of the play and the process.

[2] The first part of this list contains theatre and drama conventions and terminology described in detail in Neelands, J. & Goode, T. (2000). Structuring Drama Work: A Handbook of Available forms in Theatre and Drama. (2nd Ed.) Cambridge University Press, 8-90.

[3] The Joker has the ability to move on and off the staging area, in and out of the audience and come from every angle into the action of the play. The mobility helps to set or check the pace of the presentation and bring focus to audience members and scenes that are *working* to move the play, players and the conversation forward.

Through role-play, one distances oneself and can therefore see oneself and one's vision of the world differently" (Norris, 1999, p. 235). The important question for this researcher is *why* the Joker chooses a particular convention at a particular time with a particular group of people. The answer may reveal, at least in part, the essences universal to jokering and to teaching.

The Joker generates a vocabulary the audience can use to absorb, describe, talk about, interpret and internalize their experiences of Mirror Theatre. The terminology includes lexical buzz words and phrases like, *"don't try this at home," "win-win," "easier said than done," "we're not there yet, you have homework to do"* and *"people use, misuse and abuse power."* Scenes portrayed in the play are intended to point out the ramifications of anti-social behaviour. The Joker starts each performance with an introduction that includes the statement "we don't like our play. Some of the characters are not behaving very well as you will soon see. In order to deal with the issue we're concerned with today, we have to show these scenes, but we don't like them and, please, *don't try this at home*." Catch phrases like this are picked up easily and quickly by children and adults alike and serve as reminders that there are lines people should not cross. As a researcher what language the Joker teaches to or develops with the audiences tells a great deal about jokering and teaching.

Brechtian devices, commonly engaged in the work of Theatre in Education companies, are at the core of the jokering techniques and strategies employed by the Joker. Narration, the alienation effect, *gestus* and questioning that ensures the audience is exposed to both sides of an issue (thesis/antithesis) are part and parcel of jokering.

Underlying each scene presented in Mirror Theatre is Brecht's concept of *thesis* and *antithesis*.

> This 'conscious use of contradiction' underlies, I believe, virtually every directorial decision made by Brecht. It is the key to his work as director at every stage of his career. If, in one rehearsal, you have built up so-called 'good qualities' in a Grusche (*Caucasian Chalk Circle*), or the farmer who sells her the milk, or Simon her lover, or Azdak, then be sure to bring out so-called 'negative' qualities in other rehearsals. Likewise, if you have stressed slowness and deliberate 'breaks' in the play in one rehearsal then be sure to build up speed and continuity on other rehearsals. And, as you do this, do not repeat, do not resolve the contradictions inherent in the method. Remember always that complex individuals and complex action are made up of multiple layers of contradictions. (Fuegi, 1987, p. 158)

Issues that concern people most generate mixed feelings and raise a multiplicity of questions. The Joker must be careful to direct, or better, to urge the audience away from simplistic solutions.

> They did their own assessment [the participants] by juxtaposing their own lives with the scenes in the play. It is up to them individually and collectively to decide their own courses of action. We provided an opportunity for this to take place. We don't treat or diagnose. The program is a tool that enables the audience to do their own diagnosis and treatment as they see fit. (Norris, 1999, p. 281)

Subjects such as bullying or fair play or rumours are very complex phenomena, for which there are no easy solutions; so, many sides of the issues dealt with in Mirror Theatre are

presented and at no time can the Joker allow the audience to go for the *quick fix* because "life ain't like that." A thesis in the *New Kid at School* scene of *Coulda/Shoulda* is that new kids have to pay their dues and should "just ignore" their tormenters. The antithesis of this same scene will be that a new kid cannot ignore the abuse he or she suffers and needs help to cope. Another thesis within the same scene is that teachers or counsellors should stop bullying in its tracks without reserve or question. The antithesis for this part of the scene will be that harassment most often occurs out of sight of figures of authority or if in the open, the harassment is not so easily defined. In the interplay and interaction of the characters in the play and the audience as mediated by the Joker, the hope is that something will be learned about the assumptions and presumptions that cause people to jump to conclusions. The Joker, as Brecht always set out to do, tries to make people think, revisit preconceived notions and try out a variety of solutions. Without this kind of introspection and reflection amongst the participants, social change or even a slight change in behaviour or attitude remain a distant hope at best. In each scene there would be numerous theses and antitheses and spontaneously the Joker would find others during the show to "keep all the balls in the air" to encourage the audience to think through the issue "rigorously."

Brechtian narration and his A-Effect (alienation effect) are also part of the jokering techniques. Audiences usually find characters in a play (or on TV or in a movie) they can identify with. Because an audience tends to empathize or even sympathize with a character, most often the victim, all sides of the issue presented may not be considered or understood by the audience.

> Our play's not about characters. If you align with [a character] you miss the point. You miss the issues. Brecht says, stop. Don't align with the narrative. Come and watch the narrative as a meta-narrative and then begin to critique the narrative. We're continually reminding the audience of the play. (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May17, 2002)

Solutions to victimization are often seen as self-evident, but perhaps the bully is or was a victim too. To intercept this identification with a character, the Joker or another actor steps in to narrate the thoughts and feelings of the characters on stage or speak in the third person rather than a first person narrative, so that the audience is distracted or "alienated" from the character's situation and emotional state. The audience's response is, therefore, less emotional and more thoughtful. "The aim of this technique, known as the alienation effect was to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident" (Brecht, 1978, p. 138). In observing or playing the role of Joker I've witnessed and felt the need to return members of the audience back to the complexities of the issue again and again. It is always too easy to take sides and the seemingly obvious solution seldom addresses all aspects of the controversy.

Another Brechtian device used in jokering is *gestus*.

> 'Gest' is not supposed to mean gesticulation: it is not a matter of explanatory or emphatic movements of the hands, but of overall attitudes. A language is gestic when it is grounded in a gest and conveys particular attitudes adopted by the speaker towards other men. The 'look of a hunted animal' can become a social gest if it is shown that particular manoeuvres by men can degrade the individual man to the level of a beast; the social gest is the gest relevant to society, the gest

> that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances. (Brecht, 1978, pp. 104–105)

Actors in Mirror Theatre rehearse, through sculpting and guided imagery exercises, attitudes and gestures that audiences recognize in performance as actions that tell the *real story* through the subtexts of gesture and body language. The *Birthday Pencil* scene from *Fair Play Rulz* has a character playing with a new pencil he has received as a birthday present. The character drops the pencil by accident without realizing the loss at first. Another character picks up the pencil and claims it as her own. It's never clear whether the person finding the pencil saw the other drop it or not (thesis/antithesis). Other characters gather round to take sides and, of course, a quarrel ensues about who is the real owner of the pencil. After jokering this scene with the audience, the Joker freezes the action placing the characters in poses that suggest their attitudes toward the situation and sometimes reveals whether they're lying or not. The audience can see, inferentially if not consciously, the *gest, lying can empower, but also destroy and disenfranchise* frozen in the mirror and may wonder about what should happen with the pencil and whether honesty is really the best policy. The Joker then releases each character from the freeze one at a time and conducts an interview about what the character really thinks or knows or is honest about or is lying about. "Drama is an investigative form; it is concerned with probing questions raised (by the content) about some aspect of human experience; what would happen if? what would it be like if? what would we do if? what does it mean to be in this situation?" (Neelands, 1984, p. 36). The audience is witness to the various incarnations of themselves in the scenes offering them an opportunity to think about their own actions and what they have done or might do in similar circumstances. The Joker

tries to be a wily being offering the audience a wall of mirrors in which to see the thesis and antithesis of the *gest*.

Each Brechtian device is designed to encourage introspection, reflection and contemplation regarding significant issues affecting social interaction and provides data related to the essences of jokering. In addition conversational techniques are utilized that invite the audience into a dialogue so that as a community they can begin to point out the issues that need to be redressed hopefully starting a self-awareness consciousness. Central to the Joker's role is the desire to effect change that might make the world a better, happier place to live, but social transformation cannot take place in a vacuum or by dogmatically or omnisciently pursuing or dictating presumptuous solutions to complex issues. "The concept of audience participation (Norris, 1998 & Norris, 1999) is at the heart of Mirror Theatre's programs. The scenes are presented to evoke conversations rather than preach with forgone conclusions and solutions. The audience members are invited to discussion their own reactions to the scenes" (Norris, 2001, p. 133).

All of these qualitative methods and theatrical or dramatic techniques are instruments of data collection, in that, in addition to the recordings, transcripts, field notes and direct experience as Joker, they intensify the variety, rigour and the credibility of the research. "Rigour is the bottom line in all the work that we do. We want the casts and audience to be rigorously engaged in examining the situations and issues" (Norris, 2002, p. 8). In its approaches, format, technical production, performance and workshop methods Mirror Theatre provides a rich tapestry of qualitative data. Manifest within the intricacy of the weave are the thematic threads essential to the search for *a Joker in the classroom*. Because the methodology of Mirror Theatre is multifaceted and the

experimental and improvisational parameters broad, I had multiple *in*-sightlines from which to study the essences of jokering and I had a myriad of opportunities to observe the Joker and to contemplate and analyse what aspects of the jokering process were teacher-like. I completed the data collection phase of my research on May 17th, 2002 in the final interview with the Joker.

A "Double Take" Regarding Ethics

Due process was followed and a thorough ethics review was conducted prior to beginning this research, but it may be helpful to the reader if I clarify one particular aspect of the study that might cause other researchers pause or a *double take*. The Joker has nurtured Mirror Theatre into existence and is the one and only expert knowledgeable in its history, evolution, development and current practice. The Joker has sculpted, melded and transmogrified the jokering techniques utilized in Mirror Theatre and, therefore, must be a subject in my research. Obviously, there are ethical considerations to be contemplated when a graduate student places his project supervisor as the central subject of his research. During most of the coursework and for the research phase of this thesis, the Joker, a professor in Secondary Education at the University of Alberta, was also my advisor. A move to take up a position at another university made it impossible for the Joker to remain my advisor. The potential dubiety that may be associated with the act of making my supervisor the central subject of my research is unlikely to escape the thoughts of the readers of this graduate thesis. However the Joker is simply the only expert and educator in the field that jokers in the way I found so curiously familiar and

intriguing; consequently, it makes sense that this character become an object of my study. "Edges can be treacherous, but they can also be exciting" (Eisner, 1997, p. 4).

Choosing to place my advisor at the centre of my research was venturesome in three other significant ways: the potential existed to patronize or be unduly influenced by the subject of my inquiry; an incompatibility in approaches or method could have placed the entire project in jeopardy; and the Joker might dispute vehemently the findings in the thesis. On the first count, there's no doubt that as a member, performer and Joker of Mirror Theatre, I was subjectively immersed in the work and jokering processes of the company. Each day on tour, I worked closely with the Joker on a variety of levels, as researcher, interviewer, logistics co-coordinator, supportive co-performer and helper in all aspects of technical production and performance. I had to keep the requisite stepping back from the synergic and contagious enthusiasm with which the company performs at the forefront of my consciousness throughout the research phase. I had to rely on the repeated cautions of my advisor, the distant and focused view of the camera lens, the healthy and natural scepticism the participants brought with them into the theatre before the play began and the professional integrity of my work as an educator and researcher to sustain objectivity.

On the second count, our approaches in and perceptions of teaching and jokering do differ. The Joker emphasizes the processes of the collective and group learning while I focus my attentions upon the individual within the collective. In addition, I had no desire or need to become another Joker in a Theatre in Education company (a reality I explain in more detail later in the thesis) nor in the final analysis was I interested in a study that would explore the pedagogical and epistemological values, virtues, qualities and

ingredients of the drama itself. We both are drama and theatre trained in education, but the Joker jokers in the theatre and I wished to take the essences of jokering with me into the classroom whatever the curriculum. The concept of jokering as a teaching practice outside a theatre setting had to be established early in the study, at least, as a possibility. Such discrepancies in our aims and objectives did not in any way interfere with the progress of this inquiry and we both discovered early in our work together that our approaches were complementary rather than contradictory.

The third count of concern in this venture and perhaps the greatest risk undertaken was that the Joker wouldn't accept the findings of my research and thesis. The Joker wouldn't be any more aware of what those findings would be until the data analysis and the writing was completed. I had to wait until he read the thesis after the laborious task of an extensive, comprehensive and intensive study was done to know his thoughts or feelings or criticisms. Though it was clear from the outset that the Joker would support me in my work regardless of the outcomes, disputation, or worse, disregard of the findings of my research by the central subject of that research would be, to say the least, a crisis in credibility. However, I was not deterred nor unnerved by this potential eventuality, though thoughts of a trip down Incredibility Creek did occur to me from time to time.

The data collection in this research with interviews, audiocassettes and videotape required permission agreements with the Joker, the six actor-educators and the audiences for which we performed. All had the right not to participate in the study and were assured that the focus of the camera was always on the Joker and though students, teachers, parents, community leaders and the general public were to be caught on video, they were

clearly informed ahead of the show that they were not the subjects of this research and that none of the footage would be used in any way, shape or form for anything other than the data collection process. Agreements were written and duly signed and all participants were made aware of the purpose and objectives of the research prior to performance and given the choice to participate in the process or not. They were told that the results and findings of the research would be written into a thesis that would face a Defence before a panel of scholars at the University of Alberta in the Department of Secondary Education who would be scrutinizing my work and ethics review in detail before it is published. No name appears in the text of this thesis or the transcriptions except mine, and any follow-up data *re*-presentation need not be done with the same cast nor is likely to be presented to the same audience so anonymity will be strictly upheld. Each videocassette and audiotape I recorded has been transcribed into manuscript and the tapes destroyed.

Chapter 2

The Essential Data

Though at times almost overwhelmed by the abundant throng of thematic threads constituent in the vivid sources of this study, I analyzed the data from my direct experience as Joker, the hours of observing the Joker in the study, the field notes, the video transcripts and the conversational interviews with a fine-toothed comb to discover recurring motifs or phenomenological themes. "Phenomenological themes are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus experienced as meaningful wholes. Themes are the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through. It is by the light of these themes that we can navigate and explore such universes" (van Manen, 1984, p. 59). Complex experiential webs became evident initially through a statistical analysis of the frequency with which related and recurring data returned to the same blend of ideas. My field notes and each video or interview transcript were laboriously dissected and placed electronically into an analysis document titled, *Threads to Themes to Essences*. Each thread represented an idea or concept or a recurring word or phrase that stood out in the weave again and again. Words and phrases such as *voice, no easy answers, trust, invitation, reflection, metaphor, free play, the safety of the Mirror, what the participants gain, problematics* and over one hundred other ubiquitous threads kept showing up in the data. Data similar in character were linked together and reference points in the text were duly recorded by transcript and page number. To use the language of the electronic superhighway of cyberspace the number of "hits" indicated a significant collection of cognate data, which commanded careful consideration. The threads intertwined to create patterns in the weave and

thematic webs began to appear. Each web could be represented by a single binding theme such as *invite; don't force, the Joker's dance, no easy answers, empathy not sympathy, conversation not lecture* and about fifteen others. "I think metaphorically of qualitative research as an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material. This fabric is not explained easily or simply" (Creswell, 1998, p. 13), but underpinning each of these web-like motifs or themes or textures were elemental qualities essential to their existence. An in-depth study of each "knot" or cluster of allied threads revealed commonalities that coalesced into cohesive essences fundamental to the experiences represented in the data.

As I contemplated and examined the critical mass of data each theme comprised, essences did emerge and the kindred spirits of jokering and teaching did dance into view. "It is through qualitative inquiry, the intelligent apprehension of the qualitative world, that we *make sense*" (Eisner, 1998, p. 21). Connectively, the essences emerged in pairs, though no pairing exists or can be isolated in a clinical vacuum. Everything relates to everything relates to everything else, (Berezan, 1977) so the essences of jokering are intricately entwined within the same being. The periodic table of jokering consists of elements that mesh, intermingle and interact to form the molecules and compounds that fire and inspire the Joker. However, in making sense of the essential data I've divided the discoveries into nine units; each comprised of two essences integral to the Joker's work. To shed light on the data and the conclusions I've drawn, I have reversed the analytical process I used to explicate, decipher and render the data into the essences of jokering by starting each unit with the essences and then presenting the analysis I employed to elucidate how and why I've chosen these particular essences. Secured to the essences of

jokering are teaching practices that effectuate and enlighten the quality of teaching in the classroom; therefore, at the end of each unit I've present the durable links I believe exist between teaching and jokering by relating personal and professional teaching experiences. Both practices are pedagogically and epistemologically analogous and homologous in nature.

> Human inquiry is a process of human experience and of human judgement. There are no procedures that will guarantee valid knowing, or accuracy, or truth. There are simply human beings in a certain place and time, working away more or less honestly, more or less systematically, more or less collaboratively, more or less self-awarely to seize the opportunities of their lives, solve the problems which beset them, and to understand the things that intrigue them. It is on this basis that they should be judged. (Reason, 1988, p. 231)

The anecdotal accounts of my practice appearing in the following nine units are the reflections of a teacher of long experience working with students in the trenches of educational endeavour. They are intended to edify the claims of this thesis, not to engender approval. Corroborative evidence must, in the final analysis, come from students and colleagues.

Chart One

The Eighteen Essences of Jokering and of a Reflective Teaching Practice	
1. Caring	***10. Conscience***
2. Thoughtfulness	***11. Honesty***
3. Charm	***12. Truth***
4. Belief	***13. Life-long Learning***
5. Delight	***14. Growth***
6. Balance	***15. Faith***
7. Purpose	***16. Trust***
8. Embracing Change	***17. Free Play***
9. Common Sense	***18. Love***

A Caring Thoughtfulness

For the most part, the thematic webs contained within the data emerged simultaneously, so there isn't a particular import order to the analysis embodied in the succeeding pages. Inviting conversation is the foundation stone of jokering in Mirror Theatre; so, I begin with *voice*, a recurrent theme pervasive throughout the data. Voice is referred to in a variety of incarnations: giving voice, facilitating voice, freeing voice, enjoying voice, needing voice, having voice, understanding voice, etc. The Joker works very hard to energize voice. "[We do] not want to be the 'single voice' or to have the last word. Rather its aim is to have dialogue echo long after the performance ends" (Norris, 1998, p. 66). Without conversation that genuinely respects voice people remain polarized in their issues and see little reason to change, modify or even stand for their views. "Conversation is a process of coming to a understanding. Thus it belongs to every true

conversation that each person opens [up] to the other, truly accepts [another's] point of view as valid and transposes into the other's [ideas] to such an extent that [the person] understands not the particular individual but what [the other] says" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 385). The Joker has a great desire to initiate, foster, hear and "celebrate" voice. The elemental genesis of this desire is to be found in the essences of caring and thoughtfulness. "So, what would you like to happen?" the Joker asks again and again in every show. "Good observations. Nice insights. Good ideas!" "What do you think should happen next?" "Does that make sense?" The efficacy and intent of every show rely on the voices of the audience, but the show could exist without audience participation or the jokering. I asked one of the actors, T, "what happens if you take the Joker out of Mirror Theatre?" T's matter-of-fact response was, "I think it [the show] could still be effective. I don't think it would go to waste," but T goes on to say:

> The whole thing about Mirror Theatre is that you leave it open. You leave the choices and the situations open for what they [the audience] decide to do in the end. And if you just did it without the Joker then it tends to become just preachy. And then, even if you leave it open for them to decide, they just walk away (pause) we just bow and leave and they go away. (T., Personal Communication, May 9, 2002)

To most actors, taking a bow to enthusiastic applause would signify a satisfying and successful performance, but the sense of emptiness reflected in the words, "we just bow and leave and they go away" suggests the kind of care and concern characteristic of a higher purpose. The impact of a show is never quite clear, but the experience would ring

hollow if all the audience thought at the end was, "good show." Without the thoughtful interaction and the multifarious conversation it's just another show.

Engaging the audience and actors in a mutual exploration of the issues targeted in a show and leaving them thinking or more aware is "that impact, when you know that that's the difference that Mirror Theatre can do" (T., Personal Communication, May 9, 2002). The objective is to draw the participants into an enlivened, dramatic and thoughtful conversation in which as many voices as practicably possible are heard, listened to, embraced and empowered.

> Contrarily, conspiracy can be a profoundly ethical and moral undertaking. From the Latin, '*con* plus *spirare*, to breathe together,' or better from the Old French, '*conspirer*, a learned borrowing' (*World Book Dictionary*). A conspiracy, thus, is a conversation about the relationship between present and future worlds. There is a 'breathing together,' a sharing of ideas and ideals for the purposes of an improved reality. This conspiracy is a plot against inadequate present conditions in favor of an emancipatory social arrangement in the future." (Barone, 1990, pp. 313–314)

And what underpins this benevolent conspiracy? The actors involve themselves in a caring project designed to generate, sustain and project thoughtfulness about the past, in the moment and even into the future. Actors dedicated to the reflective process contemplate their own personal motivations as actors, as teachers and as individuals.

S: Yeah. Yeah. Seeing it indirectly, but looking in the mirror. In that scene I looked in the mirror a lot.

DHKB: It's interesting that you say that because I talked to you about this the other day when I saw you do that scene with the new kid in *Coulda/Shoulda*. Though you can't relate to being a new kid you certainly can relate to the other side of the story, which helps you relate to the new kid.

> S: [The Joker] will ask you what your inner thoughts [are]. You answer as a character but what are your inner thoughts as the actor in focus?" Trying to get my character to consider both worlds, both sides. Where upon, me as a person has already made my decision. My decision is easy, well not easy but, well, I've already personally thought about it. I've done the scene many times and I've thought about it and this is what I think I would do. Or, hope sometimes, I hope this never happens to me because I don't want to be caught in this choice. Suddenly, a little bit in the scene you'll see the cast looking in the mirror. How many friends do I want? How popular do I want to be? Do I want to be picked on? I hope that never happens to me! (S., Personal Communication, May 8, 2002)

S could decide to play *The New Kid*, in a scene exploring the lived experiences of someone forced to attend a new school, purely from an actor's point of view. "The actor and the character would become one" (S., Personal Communication, May 8, 2002) and the actions and decisions would be dictated by what the character would do, regardless of what the person playing the character might do in similar circumstances. However, S has considered and pondered the ramifications of his character's actions in the scene on real people as they live their daily lives and is more interested in what it must be like to live as a new kid in school than in acting the role. As the Joker tells it:

> We've been taught always to align. Our play's not about characters. I don't want to align with the character, that's not the point. If you align with [a character] you miss the play. You miss the issues. We're continually reminding the audience of the play. [Actors will say,] 'we should have smooth theatrical transitions.' No! 'And [well] defined characters.' No! That's not what we're asking the audience to look at. (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May 17, 2002)

In rehearsal, the actors' preparation process is infused with a reflective mindfulness. The first rehearsals every season before any research or writing is done are designed to sensitize the actors to the purposes of issues-based theatre. They are informed that rehearsal time is unpaid time and any income in the long term will mostly provide

subsistence and pocket money on tour. Actors that remain in the company voluntarily sublimate their natural instincts as actors to *conspire* in the giving voice through a dramatic process that aspires to thoughtful and caring conversation amongst the participants and actors.

The following excerpt from the video transcript data relates to the *Rumours* scene from the show *Coulda/Shoulda.* In this scene the players line-up across the staging area. Though all the characters are in the same line, they exist theatrically in their own personal space. The first character tells the next person in the queue a rumour about the character at the end of the line. The first character may be starting the rumour or passing one on and, of course, he or she wants the next person to keep the rumour secret and tries to seal the bargain by reminding the person receiving the rumour that they're "best friends, so don't tell anyone else." The first character becomes isolated from the others again. The second in the line-up cannot sustain the secret and decides to pass on the rumour with embellishments to the next in-line. After passing on the rumour this person strikes the same secrecy bargain the first character tried. The rumour wends its course down the line of characters; each delighting in the chaff the rumour mill provides. The second to last character in the queue is the last person's best friend. Upon hearing the rumour, this character cannot believe what's being passed around about his or her best friend. This character is asked not to say anything to anyone, but feels obligated to tell the best friend. The last person in the line-up hears the rumour and is horrified and says, "that's not true!" and then asks, "who told you that?" The finger pointing goes back up the line right back to the first character in the line-up. The rumour is obviously hurtful, whether there is any truth in it or not, and the characters broke promises and made choices without really

considering the feelings of the person about which the rumour is told. The Joker enters to engage the audience in a conversation regarding the ramifications of such behaviour.

After jokering the scene with the audience for a minute or two, the Joker invites volunteers from the audience onto the stage to play the for and against "voices in the head" of one of the characters in the *Rumours* scene of *Coulda/Shoulda*. Prompted by other audience members they conduct a tug-of-war debating the pros and cons of telling or not telling a rumour as if they exist in the mind of the character. With the voices in mind the character has new information and other thoughts to consider in the decision to pass on or not to pass on the rumour.

> (*J*[4] *starts the rumour and the scene progresses. E refuses to pass the rumour and walks away. H hams it up with "I'll listen, I'll listen."*)
>
> Joker: Pause. E, you decided not to. No? You know, why not, ah… based upon listening to the voices in your head, why did you decide not to [pass on the rumour]?
>
> E: Because I realized how much it would really hurt G, like, maybe, I thought it was funny and… not a big deal…
>
> V1: (*One of our volunteers on the pro side of telling the rumour is in the audience now. V1 was for passing the rumour.*) Come on! Geeze!
>
> E: …I justified it that way… (*V1 does not approve as if the scene was about winning rather than deliberating behaviour*) and everyone was telling me, so, so… it was no big deal… that… I… told it, but I realized that G would be really hurt and… she's my friend,.. she's been… good to me, she crimps my hair and…
>
> Joker: Okay, so good, so in other words… you think, feel, you've made the right decision.
>
> E: Yep. (Video Transcript, *Coulda/Shoulda & Fair Play Rulz*, 7th show of this Mirror Theatre Tour)

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[4] In the interests of anonymity and in accordance to Mirror Theatre policy, characters in the video transcripts are assigned letter names, which may vary from scene to scene though the cast remains the same. As part of the "alienation effect" actors use their real name in character and out. The characters are not "what we're asking the audience to look at." Volunteers from the audience are designated As or Vs.

The dissenting voices in the audience are respected for their point of view, but the character in the scene must make up her own mind. As many perspectives from as many participants as possible are given voice and then, the Joker lets the character make an informed decision based on the knowledgeable debate provided by the audience. But why is the Joker compelled to place the mirror before the audience so they can speak to themselves and each other again and again, show after show, year after year?

"The reason for emphasizing voice and other tropes is not to gussy up language so that it is 'humanistic' or 'artsy'; it is to serve epistemological interests" (Eisner, 1998, p. 4). As a teacher of children, a practitioner in teacher education and educator interested in ongoing pedagogical development both personally and professionally, the Joker uses heuristic and hermeneutic methods to advance teaching practice and to become increasingly cognizant of how knowledge can be imparted effectively. This form of theatre is also a rich experimental venue for teachers in training or in practice to reflect upon their communication skills and revisit the principle that students need authentic voice in their own educations. "I think it's a very interesting research style of reflective practice where you can use the juxtaposition of your practice with someone else's to help make explicit your own practice" (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May 8, 2002). The Joker has vested pedagogical interest personally and for students, but this dedication to the profession does not explain fully a long sustained fidelity to the humanistic endeavour of Theatre in Education. In the rehearsal prior to the week long run of shows the Joker said:

> It's a lot of fun and it's a lot of energy, but what we really want to do is make sure that [the show is] slow enough for the audience to catch it. What I really want us

to do is slow down tonight. Don't worry about the high energy. Let's worry about finding the focus of the play. The energy plays itself. It's like a slingshot, soon as you let it go, it goes, so I'm not worried about that part. I'm worried about really focussing on the meat of the scenes. Got it?" (Video Transcript, *Fair Play Rulz*, 1st show of this Mirror Theatre Tour)

What the audience will understand from the scenes and what conversation will be generated are paramount in the Joker's mind.

Following is part of the conversation generated by the *Birthday Pen* scene from the show, *Fair Play Rulz*, which takes place on a playground. In *Birthday Pen*, one of the characters is playing with the pen that was received as a birthday present. While returning the pen to a pocket, the character drops the pen but doesn't notice the loss. Another character on the playground picks up the pen and claims it. The first character realizes the loss of the new birthday pen and sees the second character has it. The character goes to ask for the pen back. Other characters are gathering around the one with the pen, congratulating the second character on the find. The first character asks for the pen back and is told, "finders keeper; losers weepers!" A fight ensues, a teacher (the Joker in role) intervenes and the characters are asked, "whose pen is it?" The second character says, "My mom bought it for me," and other friends support the claim. Though the "loser" explains truthfully how the birthday pen was lost, the teacher decides that "majority rules" and gives the pen to the finder. Obviously, there are some playground rules here that need to be revisited.

Joker: G should have [given] him back his pen when she found it on the ground. Anyone agree with that? (*A collective, yeah...! from the audience*) okay, lots of agreements. Anyone wanna give a reason why ya think that should happen? Yes?

A12: He got it for his birthday and maybe it's really special to him?

Joker: He got it for his birthday and maybe, it's really special to him. G, is your character hearing all these things?

The Joker always repeats what an audience member says to ensure that the entire audience hears the comment or suggestion. An inclusive, informed conversation can only take place if many views are presented and heard by the entire audience.

G: Yeah.

Joker: (*The Joker constantly roams the audience to vary the responses and involve more and more kids in the interaction. To G)* Very good. (*The Joker responds to someone else with a hand in the air)* yes?

A13: He coulda put his name on it so he got it back.

Joker: Okay, you could have put your name on it. That might have solved something. Very good (*turns to another participant*) yes?

A14: If she found it, she should ask some kids.

Joker: If you found it, you should ask some kids… maybe, did anyone lose it? Okay, some other suggestions… okay, a couple more, yes?

A4: But sometimes people lie to get their friends to have something like uh… F or… whatever his name is… (*this participant nailed it!)*

Joker: Yep…

A4: He lied to say, "I was there when G bought the pen."

Joker: I'm gonna follow that for a minute… you can put your hands down, we'll have a chance to talk at it… F, your character's on the spot for a minute. (*To* A4) Good insight. Now, so what you're saying is that people for their friends do things that maybe aren't right?

A4: Yeah…

Joker: But they do them because of their friends? So, F, what did you say?

F: I said that I was there when she bought it.

Joker: (*To the audience*) Is that true? (*Audience says a collective "no" that rises into a crescendo*) F, is it true?

F: (*With a little hesitation and almost in a whisper*) No. (Video Transcript, *Fair Play Rulz*, 2nd show of this Mirror Theatre Tour)

"The Joker doesn't judge, the Joker teases, the Joker twists, the Joker ponders, [but] the Joker doesn't judge" (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May 17, 2002). If enough voices discuss, deliberate and debate an issue people can make informed decisions about any changes they'd like to make to their lives, but because they want to, not because they're told to. The Joker does not condemn the character for lying; rather, the conversation is about why the character would lie.

Joker: So, why did you say it, F? Why did your character say it?

F: Because if I didn't then, G won't like me.

Joker: So, you're saying you're friends with G so, you'll try to stick up, ah… with your friends and you're afraid if you said, "no," she wouldn't like you?

F: Yeah.

Joker: So, you're saying friends are important?

F: Yeah.

Joker: (*To the audience*) are friends important? (Video Transcript, *Fair Play Rulz*, 2nd show of this Mirror Theatre Tour)

The Joker may not like what the character has done and he may not agree with the reason for telling the lie; but the Joker, with the help of the audience, gives the character another chance to rethink, retry and perhaps, refine behaviour. The Joker finished this part of the jokering with, "Doing the right thing is a tough thing to do" (Video Transcript, *Fair Play Rulz*, 2nd show of this Mirror Theatre Tour). Through thoughtfulness and caring the Joker understands that people make mistakes. By facilitating deliberation amongst participants and supporting the engagement of multiple voices, the Joker believes there is a greater chance people will make up for those mistakes.

Important for this discussion is the suggestion that the practice of teaching actually relies more appropriately on the unique and particular features of

> qualities or virtues. The thoughtfulness that good teachers learn to display towards children also may depend upon internalized values, embodied qualities, thoughtful habits that constitute virtues of teaching. Thus, virtues are the 'learned' and 'evoked' pedagogical qualities, thoughtful habits that constitute virtues of teaching that are necessary for the human vocation of bringing up and educating children. (van Manen, 1994, p. 23)

Max van Manen goes on to include love along with caring and thoughtfulness as virtues essential in a teacher. This study does not intend nor presume to define constituent parts of "good teaching;" however, an understanding of the impact the essences of thoughtfulness and caring have on an audience or classroom of students as practiced by a Joker may help a teacher to articulate, reinforce and reflect upon teaching practice. By way of demonstration, I shall relate one of the most profound teaching experiences of my life. As I recall this experience and read the words of the student in the following anecdote (for which I have expressed written permission) I'm given the opportunity to reflect upon the essences that influenced the outcome of this encounter.

I am both a Drama and an English teacher and in one of my English classes I had assigned the writing of original short stories as part of a Short Story Unit.[5] I work one on one with students as much as I can to give constructive feedback while they work through the writing process. Most students take advantage of the feedback; others decide to proceed on their own. The stories came in on the due date and, as usual, I was very impressed with the creativity, the effort and the attention to structure and detail shown by

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[5] In fact, I require all of my high school English students to write original short stories, as I would assign my drama students script writing. Storytelling is a natural human expression needing practice and writing encourages an understanding of how a short story works and an appreciation of the art of storytelling.

most students in constructing their stories. One of the stories came from a student who had not asked my help in writing her story and was new to my classes. The story was very well written and its effect powerful. It was about a young girl who was suffering bullying at school and invisibility at home to such an extent that she decides to attempt suicide. Of course, red flags flashed into my imagination. The story had such a convincing ring of truth that I felt I must check with the author: was the story at all autobiographical in nature? I'm always cautious about approaching students about the dark secrets contained in their writing. Most write intuitively, imaginatively and empathetically, so their stories can be true to life without being real. I found a secure moment at the end of class to ask the author how autobiographical her story was. She burst into tears.

As it turns out the story was closely autobiographical except that she contemplated rather than attempted suicide. This girl was in high school. The bullying began in grade school and this was the very first time she had ever opened up to anyone about her painful experiences. I was no longer just her English teacher. I had to be her outlet, her muse, her soul mate, her facilitator, her way of working out painful events in her life. I supported her physically as she leant into me, but I positioned myself in such a way as to cover any embarrassment she may have felt as students looked back while filing out of the classroom. I drew the attention of those students still in the classroom by remaining calm and encouraging them in a friendly way to get to their next lesson. Her boyfriend, also in this English class, came to stand with us and we three stopped time for the five minutes before the next class began… a Joker can do this, stop time. For reasons of thoughtfulness and caring, I spontaneously, intuitively and experientially facilitated a

moment for her so that she could give voice to her tears and release a lifetime of dangerous, pent-up emotions.

We communicate on a regular basis years after she handed that story in for marking and I've written and performed a theatre piece using the story itself as the *voiceover* driving the action. She has caring parents, teachers and friends, but there was something about the way I teach or perhaps, about me that freed her voice and encouraged her to find and believe in her strength of character. She wrote it this way:

> *I was suicidal, for about a year and a half. The whole story is actually completely true, except for the very end. A teacher did come up to me and told me that she was worried about me, but I didn't tell her the truth. I felt I couldn't, because nothing would be done anyway. I had practiced writing the perfect suicide note, being careful to emphasize that it was not my parents' fault. Luckily for me, I was too afraid to do it. At the time, it made me feel worse because I felt like a wuss for not being able to carry through with my plans.*
>
> *I was able to open up to you because I had (have) great respect for you as a teacher, and had seen that you were not one to blow things off or be dismissive. The reason I wrote the story, however, was because at the time I was feeling bullied by some classmates, and I had thought I was past all of that. I used the story as an outlet for my frustration, and also hoped that if they heard it or read it, they would realize what they were doing. I don't think at the time I realized how deeply my experiences with bullies continued to affect the person that I was, and it was time to let it out and let it go. Afterwards I felt like I wasn't just being an over-sensitive, melodramatic kid. I knew that I shouldn't have had to endure what I did and it was not just a typical part of 'being a kid.'*
>
> *Your response to my story did help my sadness and frustration a lot. It made me feel like I had gained some power over the situation, and the fact that you were able to find use for it was felt like a long awaited validation. I would have to say your genuine concern for your students, whether it be in the class or out, is what makes your teaching so effective. I also believe that knowing how much effort you put into your students was a factor. It was especially obvious that you took your students' work seriously with your dedication to the Ain't Stuff publications[6], and your availability inside and out of the classroom.*

I do genuinely care about the people I teach as human beings, not just as students and many of them are in my thoughts long after I become their ex-teacher. She received an

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[6] *Ain't Stuff* was a series of anthologies of student writings edited and complied by me and published in-house at the school in which I was teaching.

excellent grade for her short story, a very good grade in her English course and as she became more self-aware, she seemed to gained greater control of her life.

At the end of a show the Joker says:

> We never intend to come in and say this is the way to do it. We're not a theatre company that is designing our scenes to have pat solutions that you know in reality probably wouldn't work. Every circumstance is a little different and in this situation we still don't know what's going to happen. What we want to do is to simply, bring the issues up, have a chance for you to converse with us about those issues and then, maybe as you're living these experiences you can think about things. We try to haunt you with what you've seen on the stage so that, you're thinking about the decisions your making. We leave this then as your homework for the next fifty or seventy years… because you're going be in a whole variety of these kinds of situations in your life where you'll make choices and decisions that will alter your future in one way or another. (Video Transcript, *Coulda/Shoulda*, 7th show of this Mirror Theatre Tour)

The Joker allows for the dissenting voice and protects a voice that screams for help and recognition, but is meticulous in the drive to engender a caring thoughtfulness amongst the participants. In juxtaposition, the anecdotal information presented above reflects similar essences. I try to conduct my life and practice as conscientiously as I can and I believe the opportunities the Joker and teachers can afford people to shape or reshape their lives and voice their opinions, ideas and beliefs illustrate two of the essences of jokering and teaching: caring and thoughtfulness.

A Charmed Belief

In one of the interviews an actor said, "Whenever the Joker talks I always listen" (S., Personal Communication, May 8, 2002). There are teachers and leaders and Jokers whose spirited presence commands the attention of those they work with. Something in their bearing, in their style, in their methods and approach, in the strength of their convictions that inspires belief. "Personality characteristics of the teacher are the electricity that brings the parts to life and determines the quality and ultimate effectiveness of teaching" (Eisner, 1994, p. 328). The efficacy of learning in the classroom or in the theatre is greatly enhanced by teachers or Jokers who believe strongly in their own capabilities and in what they are doing. As professional educators we must have confidence in what we profess philosophically, pedagogically and epistemologically. Students or an audience may not always articulate what fascinates them about a teacher or a Joker, but they most certainly know when the nebulosity of a lesson or play stifles rather than stimulates their *need to know*. In discussing a verbal altercation that broke out during a show between two students, one on stage and the other in the audience, the Joker chose to joker the situation as it unfolded rather than terminating the drama. "I recognized from my own intuition that I had to cut right to the heart, go through the fire, and either burn up or come through the other end" (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May 17, 2002). The Joker's belief in the concept of the mirror and in the theatre process carried the day. The Joker was able to defuse the conflict, turn a negative into a positive and say to the audience at the end of the play, "Listen to those two and think about them. Let them haunt you. The next time you see someone in pain either psychologically or physically [perhaps you can] find a way to talk [and] respect

one another" (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May 17, 2002). It was a *teaching moment*. A moment based on belief and mediated with charm, two more of the essences of jokering in Mirror Theatre.

On the tour of my study the audience ranged in age from ten to seventeen. "Putting children first—especially the youngest among them—is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do" (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p. 250). The Joker is adamant that a reflective practice in the theatre is not about actors, theatrical effects or even, the Joker. It's always about the audience, about the souls we take responsibility for who need and can use our help to think through their lives and to make sense of the world. The Joker instructs the actors, "You have to listen, to be giving, to give it up. It's about passing the puck. It's not about scoring goals!" (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May 17, 2002). The art of acting is an actor's lifeblood and affecting an audience with a well rehearsed and well-played characterization is the essence of an actor's craft; yet, most actors (and I've worked with many more in this company than represented in the data of this study) willingly rationalize and employ their acting abilities to the work of the company. Each audio transcript excerpt below (non-sequential) illustrates the selfless endeavour each member involved in this study embraces when working with the company:

> H: I think we've really missed out if the comments are, "It was really good. The show was really good," or "the acting was really good," or "it was really funny," or "I thought you guys were really good actors," I just say, kind of, 'Thank you'. And other actors are going, "oh." Whereas, if I have a student come up to me, even one, and say, "thank you very much for coming," or "thank you for saying what you did," or "I was you, or I am you in my school. People pick on me." Those…that identification in that mirror…that's where I think we…. That's my hope, that it doesn't end… especially [for] those who participate, the really eager ones who came back [again] last night… you know, the ones who can hopefully begin to live a life differently than the [characters in the] play… live that life and

continue the play. Life's all a stage anyway, right? (H., Personal Communication, May 10, 2002)

DHKB: There's an educator's intent in everything that you do. When you say that it's not the acting, it's not, you know, whether we're successful in a show [or not, or] how we got through it, but [rather] did we actually touch somebody... that's what teaching's about in my thinking. (H., Personal Communication, May 10, 2002)

S: Yes. Umm, discussions will arise in class teaching Social Studies talking about current events, things that are happening in the news. Ahh, if you look at the conflicts in the Middle East, if you look at the headlines of the teachers' strike, whatever. Discussions will arise. And the discussion gets a little lively, a little entertaining. It's what I like to do and I know it's a success when they come back the next day and they say, "I have another thing to say because I was talking with my mom and my dad." And that's when you go, "aha! You took it home with you. Good." (S., Personal Communication, May 8, 2002)

J: If we're able to reach, how [the Joker] puts it, "a handful of kids" then we've done our job. But if we're able to reach out to everybody, boy, that's something. That would be something. (J., Personal Communication, May 9, 2002)

G: And to me like, that's when it works, when the audience is resistant or thinks this is dumb, this is stupid, "I don't need to know about bullying" or "I don't need to know about peer pressures. I know everything about it," and they have this perception that they know it all and they come here and the barriers break down and they're involved. And when it's those kids or those people who are so resistant and they're the ones that end up becoming the most involved. To me, that's when it's working. (G., Personal Communication, May 9, 2002)

M: It's very empowering. I think it's very in depth, I think, because you're asking them to sort of reiterate what they saw, reflect, talk… I think it's a very active style of, I guess, teaching because the kids are…just because they're not yelling out answers or having their hand out, they're still thinking, they're having a dialogue with themselves. They may have a quick little dialogue with the person next to them or with other people and then there's the group discussion. There's a lot of different levels of discussion. And I think with the format that's used here people go away and they still have that dialogue with themselves and with others as well, and the group discussion still continues because we've heard stories where the teacher will use, "well, remember…do you remember that scene? What happened? Well, was there something that we learned that maybe we should do right now?" And the kids go, "oh yeah! Oh, yeah!" (M., Personal Communication, May 8, 2002)

T: So I thought the way that most of our scenes work, it was entertaining enough that they could laugh at the characters and find out what they were doing, but they also could connect with most of the characters. And after, in the meetings [workshops], when they can practically transcribe everything that we did on stage, when you can tell that they were watching…I think that's when it worked. (T., Personal Communication, May 9, 2002)

Without exception the actors have the desire to "give it up" for their audiences. They don't abandon their acting and teacher training or experience, but they do project their talents into the synergy of their work. They support the humanitarian objectives of the company, are motivated by its good work and believe strongly in the process by which people are engaged in and entrusted with their own learning.

The audience, however reluctant to start, usually join in and participate and become engrossed in the debate, the conversation, the discussion, the action, the reaction, the give and take and the *free play* (Nachmanovitch, 1990). The following sequence comes from the video transcript of *In-between*, the show I directed and jokered. The audience was comprised mostly of graduate students in education, very much in tune with pedagogy and, as you will read, very much involved in rethinking their "theoretical experiential background" and in an epistemological relationship with the Joker and the cast. As a reminder, *In-between* is metaphorical in presentation in that each scene represents people caught dichotomously in-between while facing issues of race, culture and gender. The scene referred to in the following excerpt involves a family from a cultural and racial group that practices the traditional values of female domesticity and male dominance as the breadwinner. The person caught in the middle is the daughter who lives in a reality outside the home where such traditional values are passé and thought "old-fashioned" and out of step with the times. The father arrives home and the loving wife greets him at the door and offers him a drink and a snack. The father sits down at the TV and she returns to the kitchen. Both seem happy in their roles. It was absolutely essential that we were playing a family believing in their lifestyle, not an insincere stereotype. The daughter arrives home from school with a friend. The family is obviously

happy together in their world. The daughter's friend is enchanted with the family's old-world values (ways of being unfamiliar in her experience) and both she and the daughter join the mother in the kitchen to help prepare supper and set the table. The conversation comes to the daughter's future plans. She's thinking about attending University. When asked by Dad why she would choose a career over domestic bliss, she is reluctant to express her feelings. The reactions of the friend in the scene are mostly of surprise and fascination that such a conversation would even come up in a "modern" family. The friend, as observer, plays the audience's varied responses, which may range from sceptical disapproval to *live and let live* approval. The daughter turns to her mother and asks, "Is this the life you wanted, Mom? Staying at home and…." The father interrupts to say, "of course, your Mom stays at home and I go to work." The mother reinforces this belief system by piping in with, "Yes, I have a good, secure life and I love doing things for my family." Out of the series of scenes incorporated into the show, this is one that the audience wished to discuss immediately. As Joker, I took the audience's suggestion and ran with it…

A4: One of the issues I see with it is that we all come in no matter how well intended the way it's supposed to be from our own theoretical experiential background.

A6: And isn't it enough to risk disturbing what we think it's supposed to be through reacting to what should be.

A4: So, J, your character has a different way it's supposed to be and you're misjudging or whatever this situation as if this is an incorrect way for a family to behave. Does that help?

A2: On the other hand though, J could walk into that situation and say "wow, your mother cooks dinner, Gawd, I wish my mom would do that because when I come home there's nobody there and I have to cook Kraft Dinner for a snack until Mom and Dad…. There's some kids who'd die for that…

Joker: Yes, just to have that contact and that sort of time.

A2: But I think the thing is whatever your family… no two families are the same, but like everybody has a job. If he doesn't do his work, that's his responsibility… there's no money. If she doesn't organize the home, make sure things work there might not be food, the bill might not be paid or whatever… they both have jobs.

Joker: Just different responsibilities. It's more of a team.

A2: But he's not a slob if he believes [that he has fulfilled his daily share of the work]. (Video Transcript, *In-Between*, April 10 show of Mirror Theatre Tour)

As intended by the Joker, the dialogue by this time in the show has moved fully into the audience.

> In order to understand the meaning of dialogical practice, we have to put aside the simplistic understanding of dialogue as a mere technique. Dialogue does not represent a somewhat false path that I attempt to elaborate on and realize in the sense of involving the ingenuity of the other. On the contrary, dialogue characterizes an epistemological relationship. Thus, in a sense, dialogue is a way of knowing and should never be viewed as a mere tactic to involve students in a particular task. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing. (Macedco, 2000, p. 17)

I've studied, observed and experienced the Joker role. Engaging audience members in a meaningful dialogue, a task not easy to accomplish, especially spontaneously, relies on a quick rapport with the participants and maintaining their interest and involvement requires a strong belief in the reflective process. "A skilled performer can integrate reflection-in-action into the smooth performance of an ongoing task" (Schon, 1987, p. 29). Charm is that particular quality that attracts (ITP Nelson Canadian Dictionary, 1997) and conviction is a fixed and strong belief (ITP Nelson Canadian Dictionary, 1997) that convincingly invites people to listen, to engage and to participate. Both qualities seem essential to working and sustaining an audience through an experience that demands so

much of them. Without the kind of charm that comes with a personality suited to taking the lead and a firm belief in the contemplative capabilities of the participants, I don't believe the Joker could convince the audience to engage even for a second. Likewise, a teacher may find a charmed belief "an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing" (Macedco, 2000, p. 17).

> Dewey's 'learning by doing' is purposive problem solving, one element of which is Being 'as if.' Personal considerations affect all knowing but more than Dewey realized. Learning is *dramatic* doing: imagining and doing are united by the 'as if.' Knowing is relative to fictional doing: a fact is known if it works in our created fiction and is felt by the player. The child knows Christopher Columbus or numbers by re-playing them. Reality is what we know when we play. (Courtney, 1989, p. 52)

John Dewey, scholar, educator and practitioner in teacher education, seems to have envisioned the playful and practical educational approach employed in Mirror Theatre and in classrooms where a teacher is more the muse or the Joker than the *boss* or the *know-it-all*. *Techies Incorporated* was a high school technical production group under my direction. The founding members were students, but they eventually became, and still are many years later, amongst my very best friends. Though we had a very strong teacher-student relationship on stage and in the classroom, we worked so many shows and theatre productions together that we couldn't help but become close friends as well. I've always believed in the teamwork approach to learning: teacher and students learning together and from each other to accomplish shared goals. Through "dramatic doing" with students in the classroom, on stage and everywhere in-between I am able, for the most part, to teach

without resorting to the artificial authority bestowed upon me by my position and *place* in the social pecking order. I don't think I've ever forgotten what it's like to be a child and I can still feel "as if" I were in their shoes—the child's voice within, as it were. I think this practice might be part of the charmed belief I bring to teaching and is certainly part of my belief system.

I try to treat my students as people, not an age group or members of a particular socio-economic stratum or as "kids." Whatever commonalities in their behaviour and thinking patterns, each is an individual with unique experiences, understandings, capabilities and potentials and I respect and admire this distinctiveness. Students often respond with a mutual respect, which allows the teamwork to move forward for all involved in an educational experience. Complex supportive relationships develop amongst members of the team working together at the highest possible standard as colleagues in the same scholastic endeavour, not as teacher and learners or as leader and followers. In Techies Incorporated, each member of the team would take the lead with a particular expertise, depending on the needs of the show: in lighting or sound or make-up or photography or heights or timing or calling cues. I was very much aware as teacher what learning I could offer each member of the team and I worked very hard to provide those experiences without making evident my role as educator. Like the Joker, I work diligently for rapport, ease of conversation, an atmosphere of mutual respect and a friendly working relationship with my students and I believed in them more than they believed in themselves.

The quality of work the techies completed gave us a reputation as theatre production experts in the local area and our abilities were renowned beyond the

community in which we lived. Techies Incorporated covered all school events with light and sound and in June 1980 we were set up and scheduled to technically produce the school's graduation ceremonies. This was an important show that required equipment and personnel in two separate buildings. In this show I had the role of technical director and they were the *techies*. My wife went into labour with our first baby the night before graduation. It was a long complicated labour that went on for over 24 hours. The doctor suggested I go home to get some rest and I did. I got home, flopped onto the couch and was out like a light. I don't know how long I had been asleep, but I suddenly sat bolt upright and bounced off the couch to the phone. It hadn't rung, but I felt an intense need to call the hospital. I talked to the doctor. My wife's condition had worsened and the baby was going to be induced. The doctor didn't tell me anything else. I returned to the hospital and met the doctor in the hall and was informed that the baby had died and my wife was being prepped for a Caesarean section.

The devastation of that day when we lost our son, D. C., is still with me today, but let me tell about what Techies Incorporated did for us in that troubled time. I couldn't go back to school to direct the production of *Grad*. I talked to the crew over the phone and they said not to worry. They had so much experience by that time and were so good at their jobs they didn't hesitate to take over. They aced that graduation ceremony and they kept in touch to make sure my wife and I were going to be okay. When my daughter was born about a year later, Techies Incorporated was there, not directing the production exactly, but helping to welcome our daughter into the world. They brought gifts and good times and they have been my good friends ever since. I am forever indebted to them for their many kindnesses (Berezan, 2000). Each and every one of these techies would testify

and have done that my teaching approach was, to say the least, somewhat unusual, but we have all been very clear on what we learned together during those heady high school days. One writes it this way:

> *The two words that I have chosen to describe you are: compelling and passionate. I found that as a teacher, you displayed great passion for bringing out the best in your students. It was through that passion for your work that I was compelled to give you my best effort. There are so many words that I could use, to express what you meant to me as an individual. To this day, I will treasure the memories and the times that we have spent together. The words awesome and silly bugger also come to mind, [but] I choose compelling and passionate, final answer—back to you Regis. You always made me feel like a million!*

We believed in and trusted one another so much that we could rely on each other educationally and psychologically in the direst of circumstances. I still marvel at their selflessness and I'm a better person and teacher for knowing them. I was a Joker in their classroom, literally and pedagogically, and I learned from them and with them that essential to the significant and synergic experiences we've shared was a passionate charmed belief.

A Delightful Balance

The first and only rule of learning is that there is always something more to learn. We learn from every experience, every person and everything we come in contact with in our lives whether we want to or intend to or not. We are all teachers and we are all learners. I've learned as much from my students as they have learned from me, perhaps more. "The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches" (Friere, 2000, p. 80). To be fully aware and absorbed in the quest for knowledge I find I must be with my students rather than in front of them. There is a delicate and symbiotic balance between

imparting knowledge and acquiring knowledge and when the knowledge imparted has facilitated the acquisition of knowledge for a student who in turn teaches the teacher about the value of the teaching and knowledge shared, a delightful mutually educational balance is struck. What students often bring to the learning process are those "eureka moments" in which I learn what otherwise might never have occurred to me—a particularly delightful experience, indeed. "I'm drawing attention to children's unique ways of seeing themselves and the world around them, and the way those perceptions develop in response to the changing worlds of home and school… their way of perceiving is unique in its buoyant openness and directness" (Neelands, 1984, pp. 2–3) and in its capacity to teach and stimulate learning.

The Joker strives for a similar balance between the didactic and the heuristic. *What* we teach is far less important than *how* we teach it whether in the theatre or in the classroom. "The one tribute we can pay the audience is to treat it as thoroughly intelligent. It is utterly wrong to treat people as simpletons when they are grown up at seventeen. I appeal to reason" (Brecht, 1978, p. 14). The Joker believes in what Warren Linds, a fellow Joker, calls *spiral diving*.

> The facilitator is a participant in a drama workshop with peers, using all senses and being present to journey with the other participants in the exploration. I am a learner too. I am not acting on the others, the participants; I am co-implicated in a process of exploration and co-evolving alongside the participants in it. I shift back and forth as facilitator-as-participant, and as participant-as-facilitator. The task of the facilitator is to create balance, challenging without confronting. I do not know what will happen in the process. I can only create the conditions for

> something to happen. Within these conditions (the social, emotional, intellectual context of learning), I am sensitive to what it is like to be spiral diving. (Linds, 1999, p. 274)

The outcomes of learning are a matter of process rather than product and can spiral continuously into the future well after the jokering or the teaching is done.

The following sequence from the *Birthday Pen* scene in *Fair Play Rulz* illustrates the "facilitator-as-participant" and "participant-as-facilitator" balance that a Joker strikes in a performance and the delight the Joker takes in working the audience through the crux of an issue (see page 45 of this thesis for a description of *Birthday Pen*). We pick it up after the initial playing of the scene when the audience is debating whether the rule *finders keepers; losers weepers* is a good one or not. The question is, whose pen is it, really?

Joker: Ooookay. These things happen. Now, the thing is… you still believe it is her pen, right? Because what was the rule?

I: (*I is one of the actors in the scene*) Finders keepers; losers weepers.

Joker: According to them, that's the rule, so, it is G's pen, right?

I: Yeah.

Joker: (*To the audience*) Yes? (*Again, a crescendo of "no's"*) so, you (*the audience*) don't believe in the rule, finders keepers… okay. You've done very well already and thanks very much… as I said, the name of the play is, *Fair Play Rulz*, and what we're asking you is to tell us whether the rules are fair or not and you're saying, this one isn't fair, finders keepers, losers weepers isn't very fair. But what I am going to do is try it a little bit more, F come in here (*F plays another of the characters in the scene*). I'm kinda curious to see what would happen if I gave the pen back to H (*the original owner of the pen*) after… the three people said what they did. So, let's go from there. (*Reinforcing the issue in question with the audience*) Whose pen is it?

Here the Joker has stepped back into role of the teacher who has intervened in the argument over the pen.

I: It's G's pen.

Joker: (*To F*) Whose pen is it?

F: It's H's. He was playing with it earlier.

Joker: (*To J*) whose pen is it? Ho, ho, ho… you don't know what to say do you?

J: I showed up and G was… was holding onto it, so, it's G's because I saw her… I saw her holding onto it.

Joker: So, because G had it, you think it's her pen?

J: Yup.

Joker: Okay. I'm going to pause myself for a second. (*To the audience*) what do you think I should do? (*The Joker responds to a participant with a hand up*) Yes?

He moves out of role and back into the personae of the Joker. In the banter that follows the Joker is now a participant in the debate as well as the facilitator of scene.

A1: I think you maybe, should give the pen to H.

Joker: Why?

A2: Because it's his…

Joker: I don't know that…

A1: It seems to be 'cause…

Joker: I *don't* know that.

A3: Look at H.

Joker: I don't know that…

A4: Look at H!

Joker: So, what your…(*another participant pops a hand into the air*) yes?

A5: Ask the girl in the pink… overalls?

Joker: Okay, so I could go and ask more people. (*To E, another character in the scene*) whose pen is it?

E: I saw H drop the pen.

Joker: You saw H drop the pen. Okay, so I have G's... G's... H's... H's... I don't know H... can I say majority rules and give it then to...

A2: H.

Joker: H? Yep?

Audience: (*General approval.*)

Joker: (*J whispers "ask the teachers" in the Joker's ear*) yeah, that's right. How many people say no? Are there any no's on this one. Yes?

Teacher:(*This is a teacher in the audience, not the teacher character in the scene*) I don't think that a teacher usually does majority rules...

Joker: Okay, very good...

Teacher:...and decides who gets [the pen].

Joker: Very good.

A2: Teachers keep it.

Joker: (*Audience laughter*) ho, ho... let's kind of pursue this a little bit. Very good. A teacher would keep it. (*the Joker pretends to be a teacher walking away with the pen*) Okay, see ya later...

H: Ho, you stink, it's my pen!

Joker: (*Playing the teacher on the playground*) I'll see you after school twice now. (*More laughter from audience*) so, the point is... okay. What should teachers do? Help us out here. All of the cast up here, most of the cast up here are actually students studying to be teachers. So, you have a good chance right now to help them understand some things, so, you're going to be the teachers of teachers for a couple of minutes, so, give them some good advice about what to teach... about what you think the teacher should do. Yes, a hand up down here.

Again, the Joker is the muse trying to promote and encourage a balance of views amongst the participants.

A6: Me?

Joker: Yes.

A6: You could give it to the principal and he could put it on the announcements.

Joker: Okay, principal, [put] it on the announcements. (*Looks to take in another suggestion from the audience*)Yes?

A7: The teacher should make sure that… check if there's a name…

Joker: Okay, check to see if there's a name?

A7: Yeah.

Joker: Okay. A way over there.

A4: Phone his parents.

Joker: Phone [the] parents. Okay, I'm going to make it even more complicated. (*Back in role as the teacher*) Hey, I got a busy job here… you know, I have to mark your papers, I have to make lesson plans, I'm here from 7 o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock at night, now you're asking me to make phone calls and check with this over… a little pen?

Audience: (*A few say*) yes. (*And then, there's a howl of no's and yeah's.*)

Joker: Oh, please… (*to the actor-teachers on stage*) you sure you want to be teachers after this? There are lots of tough jobs here. (*The Joker moves to get another suggestion and keep the conversation going*) Yes, over here.

A14: Umm… find his fingerprints…

Joker: (*He laughs*) Find his fingerprints, then we'll see... okay, maybe we'll see G's over on top of someone else's. But it's not just up to the teachers is it? Okay, G, H? I'm going to say, [that] last week, you saw this play in school and you saw this actually happen a week later. I'm going to rewind [the scene] and I'm going to have H drop it and I'm gonna see what your character might do this time. Okay, based upon the insights that the audience has given us. Okay. (Video Transcript, *Fair Play Rulz*, 2nd show of this Mirror Theatre Tour)

"Based on the insights the audience has given us" the scene can be replayed and various scenarios tried and tested. A delightful balance has been struck in educative atmosphere of mutual respect, fun and entertainment.

The actors embrace and strive for this mutually enlightening "symbiotic relationship" as well.

H: I get to do something I really care about which is, you know, social change and trying to create somewhat of a better community to live in. Not so much competition all the time, not always having to do one-upmanship, something I care about. Acting is one of my favourite things, my favourite mediums and I get to do a little bit of both [social change and acting]. They [the audience] feel comfortable enough to be honest with you and to really think about it. (H., Personal Communication, May 10, 2002)

J: I mean, whatever you're teaching, at the same time while you are trying to teach a student, [from] the student's interaction with you…you're also learning from them as much as they are learning from you. You're getting a lesson in life and they are your students. (J., Personal Communication, May 9, 2002)

G: Well, with the jokering, [the Joker] leaves it up to them [the audience] to decide if they want to participate or not. [The Joker] gives them that rule of dissension and that's really important [which] gives them a sense of ownership over the show even though it's our show [the Joker] makes them think that it's their show. (G., Personal Communication, May 9, 2002)

M: ...simultaneous dramaturgy is left to the cast and audience in developing the improvisation?" There's a certain…it's like, I look at the jokering…I think it's very much an art form. It's knowing when to give, when to take, when to take somebody's suggestion and clarify it. It's a whole craft of knowing when to do these things, just like it is in your classroom, and I think that's the thing that's fascinating about the Joker. It's just knowing when to…[the Joker] doesn't always, if you notice, doesn't always accept everything that the students say…[or the Joker will] say, "wow, that was great! But I think just for now we'll just focus on this one area and I'd like to pull [that suggestion] out because there's something valuable [in what you say]." So it's just that whole craft of trying to get that magic…. (M., Personal Communication, May 8, 2002)

T: So, it becomes really important for the Joker to kind of go, "okay, I can't re-say that but if I just alter their words a little bit then it's still, it's a win-win situation." The Joker has to be there all the time and watching the audience reactions. So, [the Joker] can never be too focussed on what's happening on stage and just really paying attention to how the audience is reacting and what they're saying and what's going on with them in order for the jokering to work. There's just such a great energy to the whole school. I just feel very comfortable in this space where I am. And the jokering comes into play in all that. (T., Personal Communication, May 9, 2002)

S: I think in the show, we're all teachers. The Joker's a teacher, the cast is teachers, and the audience themselves, one audience member to another is a teacher telling/saying this is what should happen or this is what I like to see happen or this is what I would do. (S. Personal Communication, May 8, 2002)

The relationship the actors establish with the Joker and the audience is equitable, balanced and pedagogically sound. There is a kind of thrill in symbiosis of teaching and learning for all participants.

I cannot expect of my students what I would not or cannot do myself and so I lead as best I can by example. I value honesty, humility, conscientiousness, accountability, willingness to learn, dedication to improvement and a desire to know and though students

may be reluctant to admit as much, they value these teaching, jokering and learning qualities as well. Though I'm quite aware of the preoccupations of youth, I do expect my students to learn, to show respect and self-discipline, to find some worth and fun in learning, to explore capacities they do not even know they have and to embrace the attitude, "failure is not an option."[7]

At the beginning of a term or semester I relate to each of my classes the scene from the movie Apollo 13 when Gene Kranz, the team leader of Mission Control in Houston, points with a piece of chalk to a diagram on a blackboard that indicates how far the flight controllers believe the Odyssey will take the Apollo 13 crew before losing all power on the spacecraft. He dots the board back and forth dramatizing the point that if they accept this eventuality the crew of Apollo 13 are already as good as dead. Gene Kranz says, "gentlemen, that's not acceptable" and at the end of the scene he storms out of the room shouting, "failure is not an option!" I tell my students that not one piece of equipment was added, not one member of the crew or the mission control personnel changed and not one of the dangerous circumstances of this ill-fated manned space flight was ameliorated. A rescue mission was impossible and the odds of getting the astronauts back were hugely against success. I ask my students, "if at one point the flight controllers virtually condemned the crew to death, what changed so that in the end they could bring them home?" Of course, the answer is "attitude." That's all that changed. When failure is not an option, success is always possible. The import of this change in attitude is amplified ten-fold when one considers that the story of Apollo 13 is true. I link this

[7] This maxim was most poignantly stated by Gene Kranz, head of mission control for Apollo 13, in the movie and in reality.

axiom to another of my philosophical mantras, *learning has so much more to do with attitude than it does with subject matter.*

I never know what any of my students will take from this story and my adamantine spiel about my expectations. I do, however, try to help students in their work to realize that there is more in them than they think and that I believe in them more than they believe in themselves. One student struggled greatly in English and had done so for all the years of her schooling thus far. She had experienced a lot of failure. She had a gentle spirit, a respectful demeanour toward me and she laboured dutifully along never believing she'd ever pass an English course with any mark much above 40%. She had been an *underdog* for so long, she believed that rising above her lot educationally was beyond her capabilities, but shortly after joining my class this student's attitude changed, as it turned out, unbeknownst to me.

I think that I am particularly good at helping the underdog achieve greater self-confidence and raise aspirations (after all, I was very much an underdog myself, when I was young). I simply refuse to allow them a *can't do* attitude. If they come to me to say, "I can't do this," I say, "I think you can and here's some ways to start." For the particularly persistent, I will say, "Well, if you can't, you can't. Perhaps you should just sit there and accept a failing grade." This always throws students for a loop, but their tune changes quickly to, "I'm having trouble…" and I say, "Ah, well, that's different," and away we go. The objective is to eventually purge the phrase, *I can't*, from their vocabulary. A different way of thinking emerges. A couple of other strategies I use in the classroom include my choice of marking utensil and a *feedback loop*. I don't use a red ink marking pen; I use a pencil. Certainly I mark a student's work, circle grammatical and

spelling errors and give suggestions in the margins, but pencil does not have the connotations of failure that red ink has. I respect their efforts so much that I wouldn't dare accentuate the negative. Pencil markings can be read, no pun intended, but do not visually overwhelm the student's own writing or word-processing and in fact could be erased if a student chose to—none have erased the notes. Most students take the notes to heart and learn from them. The feedback I give a student is individualized and conducted one-on-one as much as possible while the rest of the class works on task, so that I can address individual needs, anxieties, strengths, weaknesses and attitudes with the personality and potentials of that student in mind. Like a Joker, I become the muse, both demanding and encouraging at the same time. I invite them to engage in the learning, to think for themselves and try out new ideas. I am the filter for their frustrations, the channel for their successes, the *rock* upon which they can depend and the mirror through which they can see themselves and their work in a positive light. I help them to reflect upon their work without *taking my comments personally*. In the English classroom, I also allow a low-level conversational *buzz* to develop in the classroom as long as students are talking quietly about the assigned work and in Drama the buzz is a natural component of enactment and the rehearsal process. The buzz mingles with the conversation I'm having with a student or students in the *feedback loop* and reduces or eliminates any sense of conspicuousness students might otherwise feel. Students can also listen in to the feedback from their desks (or from their groups in Drama) if they choose to and pick up pointers from a distance, as it were. I do spend some time in front of the class lecturing or giving instructions, but like the Joker I'm generally out amongst the students working to find a balance between guiding the learning and encouraging their contributions to the

educational process. Does this approach work for every student I teach? No. Some students prefer the anonymity less interaction provides. Most students I work with respond positively to the way I joker the lessons and certainly the student about whom I write this portion of my thesis responded positively to this approach.

Because she was a student I hadn't taught before, I was without a point of reference from which to realize and understand how differently she was approaching her studies in English this year from previous courses. I had access to her CUM-card, but I find such information notoriously unhelpful. She was working her socks off and I came to know her as a *cool* kid who I enjoyed working with, trying her very best to get through the English course with some degree of success. We discussed texts together, she always came for feedback on her writing before handing in her assignments and I learned a great deal about how to facilitate her work without sending her down the garden path to red pen marks and failing grades on her papers. Though her grades remained in the average range, she was delighted with the consistency of her success. The difference in her thinking and learning patterns didn't come up until later in the year at a parent/teacher interview, which the student attended along with her parents. They were singing my praises and I wasn't sure why until she said, "I believe failure is not an option."

How delightful and how different the balance in her life. What more can a teacher hope for? What better reason to teach, to joker and to learn than the small differences one might make in another's life. Striking a balance that delights for both the student and the teacher and in this case the parents as well is of the essence. I believe two more of the essences of jokering and teaching are delight and balance.

Purposeful Change

Learning is a two-way street on level ground, not a one-way unidirectional top-down railroad diagonally pointed at the learner from the epistemological hilltop above. Knowledge is a life-affirming experience that changes both the teacher and the student, both the Joker and the participants. "All significant experiential learning is a change in the learner—a change in behaviour, in interpretation, in autonomy, or in creativity, or a combination of these changes" (Cell, 1984, p. 28). In the Mirror Theatre experience subjects or ideas or issues are not taught; they're discussed. All bring what "understanding, insight, appreciation and interest" (Eisner, 1994, pp. 108–109) they can to the conversation and reaffirm each other's natural proclivities toward growth and learning. Though a show or a class may start from the same script or lesson plan, the learning process is never quite the same. Relying on a creative, experimental and improvisational process that requires giving in to uncertainty and trusting the audience to rise to the occasion, though they may be reluctant to begin, places the Joker in a particularly vulnerable position. It would be easier to keep the audience at a distance and in their seats than to hope for their good will and audacious participation in the show and in their own learning. In the post-show debrief, the Joker can feel quite uneasy about how effective the jokering might have been in the show. For example:

> Joker: I'd like a little feedback here. My tension in jokering is trying to take the audience's ideas, keep us moving, not to bore them, give you some thoughts and ideas to work with and watch the pace, so, I'm trying to fill an hour and a half. So, a couple of things dragged a little bit, but if I don't stretch it here, I'm going to have to drag the last one a little bit longer. That's why we only have an hour and a half, which I think is a perfect time.
>
> J: I think you did it just right. They might have got a little restless, but they only got restless for about four or five minutes, tops. As soon as you see the first move you react rather than waiting until half the audience is restless. As soon as we started the scenes, they weren't restless at all.

Joker: Yeah, it's the same with any classroom discussion, you know, when two or three are talking, the rest get restless. (Video Transcript, *Fair Play Rulz*, 1st show of this Mirror Theatre Tour)

In the heat of the moment and in the midst of juggling so many activities at once as teachers and Jokers are wont to do, it is not always easy to know if things are working. There are more times than enough when getting out of the theatre or the classroom feels like escaping bondage. Jokering and teaching are arduous, energy taxing acts. The Joker often takes a nap between shows and I try to find private time away from students during the teaching day to re-energize and recoup my sensibilities. The absolute dread and helplessness one sometimes feels entering the theatre or the classroom can only be counterbalanced by a compelling sense of purpose and a dedication to change and the intellectual or psychological development of the participants or students involved. The money or respect or prestige or security offered teachers or Jokers can't be enough to drive them back into the fray time and time again.

Joker: I've aimed to be a point, to go to a point where I act authentically. There's no highs or lows anymore. I just dance. [Is it] drudgery? Sometimes I say, "I don't want to do this today. There are other things I'd prefer doing." But when I'm in it, there's no drudgery. I'm going to be there 110 %. I would say there is no ego there in relation to success and failure. Five years ago, I [would have said], "I'm half way there and I'm in a dangerous spot." And what I mean by 'half way there' is I didn't get pleasure out of what I did [and] I'd still get pain out of what I didn't do.

DHKB: Ahhh…

Joker: But now I'm at a point where I can accept both and still be authentic. But, I'm really not afraid of dying or living [on stage], I'm just dancing.

DHKB: It's the "best of times and the worst of times"…it's life.

Joker: And I think that's what a good teacher is; when you don't have to think about control, the kids work with you. You know what I'm getting at.

DHKB: Yeah, yeah.

> Joker: Can you imagine, thirty people on the same wavelength at the same time? That's called tyranny, that's called abuse, that's called torture. And I don't want that. The renegade is always important to me. No, I lie. I wish the renegade always was… [the renegade] is[important to me] about 80 % of the time. I do like dissension because I think that way we get stronger. (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May 17, 2002).

Whether tired or worn out or pondering the effectiveness of a show or stressed by having to unite or acquiesce to diverse personalities, the Joker pursues goals with passion and compassion and trusts in the intelligence and reflective capabilities of the audience. For the Joker, "The only road to strength is vulnerability" (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 64).

The Joker utilizes a myriad of procedures and considerations to facilitate the four-part Mirror Theatre Process.

> The techniques employed are meant to invite, not coerce discussion that enables participants to examine social issues in depth through the safety of 'what if' dramatic situations. Its four-part program begins with a series of vignettes that highlight the complexity of the issues chosen for examination. Audience members are then invited to redirect the characters, making suggestions on how to change what the characters say and do, pointing out the misuses and abuses of power. In so doing, they indirectly articulate to themselves and their peers what they believe to be appropriate or inappropriate behaviour. This stage acts as a mirror as the students rethink situations in their own lives, as they rework the drama on stage. Later they break into small discussion groups with the actors to discuss how the scenes apply to their own contexts. Finally, they report back to the large group and present their own scenes, highlighting other issues and possible solutions, or presenting a verbal report on their work. (Norris, 2002, p. 2)

The process includes a vast and amazing array of dramatic and theatre techniques, conventions and strategies that are utilized purposefully by the Joker to encourage change and that are all interwoven into the complex web of experience accomplished each show. The lexical labyrinth of this Theatre in Education approach includes terminology like research, spontaneous improvisation, momentum, pace, timing, reflections, the hook, invitation, welcome, humour, conversation, Brechtian devices, thinking, rethinking, redirection, buzz words, insight, low-level participation, the joining in, negotiation, distracters, remote control, flipping the coin, tug-of-war, voices in the head, testimonials, repeating their answers, segue, no easy answers, workshopping, positive reinforcement, thank you, homework, haunting and many more. All of these activities, creatively and imaginatively, come into the play and interplay amongst the participants, audience, cast and Joker during a show. An entire transcript of a show could not appropriately be contained here, but in the following sequence from *Fair Play Rulz* I will point out many of the various aspects of the process that exist in this excerpt, which will be representative of the method behind the madness. The scene being jokered here is *The Party* from *Coulda/Shoulda*. *The Party* illustrates relationships that develop within peer groups and the uses, misuses and abuses of power that gives one person status over another. The dialogue of the party is gibberish, so that the audience can focus their attentions on the way the characters interact rather than on what they're saying. As each character enters their reactions and vocalizations to each other clearly demonstrate who's popular, who's not, who's powerful and who's beneath whom on the totem pole in terms of status. In this performance, the audience wanted to pursue the relationship of the two characters that start the scene. One is busy tidying up, placing party things and getting the

apartment ready for their guests. The other is reading a paper, lazing about on the couch and watching the other do all the preparatory work for the party. Though the worker protests the lollygagger's laziness, he is powerless to get her to help out. This extract takes place after the scene has been presented and the jokering has begun. The italicized notes to the right beneath the passages indicate the techniques, conventions and strategies engaged at that moment of the drama.

Joker: Okay, so, some people in your groups have high status with some people and lower status with other people. What we do know is people who feel they have low status, it hurts… and sometimes that type of hurting is a form of bullying… the way we treat others, who do we exclude in our groups?

The issue is focussed, the hook is set, "it hurts" and the audience is invited to identify with the situation or scene not the characters, which is the Brechtian alienation effect aforementioned. See what is reflected by the acting rather than the acting itself. The buzz words for this scene are "status" and "misuses and abuses of power," both intended as new vocabulary the audience can use to talk about the issue and remember the dramatic circumstances in their own lives.

What we're going to do is we're going to rewind it one more time in regular motion, but I would like you to… again I don't want to push you [or] pressure you into participating, but you're giving some good thoughts and insights already and you don't have to get up and act unless someone would really like to and… and that's an option.

The use of the imaginary remote is a theatrical convention the audience accepts readily. A remote control is familiar, easily mimed and sets a framework within which the action can be worked and reworked. The Joker is trying to invite participation without coercion. The timing of the invitation to participate is crucial to the involvement of the audience later in the show. The Joker's strategy is to make it clear no one will be forced to join the actors on stage, but to intrigue the audience with the potential possibility.

When you see someone abuse or misuse their power, raise your hand, I will pause the scene and we'll talk about it. We're going to progress through this scene just a little bit, okay, to [see] the misuses and abuses of power. Good, (*The cast moves into starting positions*) ready… play.

It's time to move on to sustain the pace of the show. The issue is re-emphasized to maintain the momentum, the convention of the

remote control restarts the scene and the improvisation continues.

(*The scene runs...*)

Joker: Pause, okay, good, yes?

The convention is maintained and the conversation begins. The Joker uses a standard classroom technique in having a student raise a hand to intervene in the course of the play.

A3: Well, she was, you know, messing around with...

A4: Little Miss Attitude.

A3: Yeah...

Joker: So, Little Miss Attitude, ah... so, she's just taking it easy and making him do all the work. So, (*there is an exchange of comments in the audience and laughter*) what's that?

The Joker takes advantage of the humour that has spontaneously arisen in the audience to keep the conversation going.

A4: That's the way it usually is.

Joker: That's the way it usually is, okay. So, what can we do? To a certain extent, F's character is being misused by G's character. What can F do or say to improve the situation, any suggestions, any thoughts, give F one line he could say to change this and we're gonna shift to English [language] now?

He makes a strategic choice to redirect the audience from the stereotypical comment raised, "that's what usually happens," to the issue of power without stifling the conversation or insulting the speaker. Again the audience is to be alienated from the characters to debate the issues the characters raise.

A3: Can you help me?

Joker: Okay, can you help me—just the basic question. Okay? So, start again getting ready for the party. Ask them, "can you help me" and we'll see what'll happen. Play.

The insightful question is immediately made part of the dialogue and the actors spontaneously incorporate the idea into the play. The participation is low level at present, but the audience waits with playful anticipation for what the actors will do with the idea given by A3. The Joker usually repeats the suggestions from individuals in the audience and projects their words throughout the theatre to legitimize and reinforce their contributions.

(*The scene runs for 10 seconds and F gets only the one line out.*)

Joker: Pause. Aaaahhhh... anybody have any problems with the way he said that?

A5: He uh...

Joker: Yeah, how did he say it?

A5: More like, kinda like get up off your butt... it's just his attitude about this...

Joker: His attitude about it wasn't really (*a comment not picked up on audio from the audience causes the Joker and the audience to laugh uproariously*). So he has attitude, his character has attitude too. Okay, so, G how would you... do you think your character would respond if he said it that way.

> *The Joker, the actors and the audience are together in the moment enjoying each other's company. The respectful give and take of improvisational play is evidenced by the lack of overlapping dialogue. Each takes his or her turn without need for a dictum of rules. The questions always invite the audience to offer solutions they think of. There is no multiple-choice list of good solutions to the problems presented in the scene. The Joker trusts the problem solving skills of his audience.*

G: Hell, noooo! (*The audience laughs*) I will read my magazine. Keep going, follow that line, let's see where it ends up, keeping going.

> *The actor is very in tune now with the way the audience is responding and is playing to their collective sense of humour without going for the "cheap laugh." "The basic skill of acting is: 'an ability to engage with something outside oneself using an 'as if' mental set to activate, sustain, or intensify that 'engagement' as a central feature because it implies a relationship at an affective level between a person and the world outside him" (Bolton, 1984, p. 56).*

(*The scene continues for a spell this time, then...*)

Joker: Pause. Is it any better? (*A few audience members respond with "no's"*) no.... I'm going rewind again and I'm going to follow your suggestion. Who said the suggestion to ask and can you give him the idea of the tone of how you think he should do it?

A5: Ummmm... (*giggle*)...

Joker: Now, I'm gonna invite you right now and feel free to say no—lets pretend rather than it's a relationship, it's roommates... do you think you could try it? As a roommate? Would you like to?

V1: (*Hesitates and then...*) okay.

Though it appears in the written transcript that the Joker uses some low-level coercion here, live and on video it is absolutely clear that the Joker was drawn to V1 through the excitement and enthusiasm this volunteer was displaying toward the creative and improvisational activities on the staging area. Call it instinct or call it experience or call it opportunism, the Joker could tell V1 was engrossed in the show as it was unfolding and was a candidate for involvement in the scene as an actor.

Joker: Okay, thank you very much. (*The Joker leads a round of applause.*) Okay, so you [F] can sit down… and your name?

V1: V1.

Joker: V1? Welcome.

The scene doesn't seem to be improving, so the Joker redirects and requests the intervention from one of the participants. The Joker negotiates the conditions of the audience member's entry into the scene. A sense of trust has been established and the participant joins in. The Joker welcomes then segues into the play as if the participant is a member of the cast.

Okay, okay, so, now you are roommates and let's see if you can approach it differently, so, you're [acting] more peaceful and we're going to put the rest of the characters on. How would you like them to refer to you, what name?

V1: V1

Joker: V1? Okay, V1 is the new character and let's see you try and get ready for this party. You play the role and let's see if we can fix it up a little bit more… play!

(*The scene runs with the volunteer happily and effectively playing along.*)

Joker: Okay, pause, relax, good…. This is why we do it in drama because at least in drama you can get a chance to say, "hey, I wanna try that over again." Is it working?

V1: No…

Joker: Is V1's character trying to be nice? (*A couple members of the audience say, "yep"*) yeah, I don't see any misuse or abuse of power here, but what about G's character?

V1: Lazy.

Joker: Lazy!

V1: (*V1 indicates enthusiastically and physically*) I know what to do.

Joker: You know what to do! Rewind and let's start again, very good, thanks. Ready? Play.

There's a magical moment for you. The Joker has been persistent and patient and the strategy has worked. The participant is taking an active leadership role in the course of the drama and in thinking, rethinking and reworking the issue of the scene. The Joker without hesitation turns the scene over to the actors lead by the participant from the audience and by so doing, reinforces the confidence the Joker has in the audience. If the spell cast here takes, the student involved in the jokering and the witnesses in the audience may rethink or change their behaviour when in similar or like circumstances in their real lives. On stage they practice and try the alternatives they could chose to take into their own lifeworlds, which is all we can ever hope for.

(*Again the scene begins.*)

V1: Time for some honesty here. Now we gotta stay calm, but there's some things I gotta discuss with you and one of them is… like, I do a lot of work around here and you don't like, share…

Joker: Pause. Very good. G, I'd like to hear your character's inner thoughts right now.

G: She's probably right… (*huge laugh from the audience*).

Joker: (*V1 gives a victory down*) yes!

G: …but, uh… she's probably right and I probably should help her, but… my nails right now are a lot more important….

The actor incorporates the next Brechtian device into the play: thesis and antithesis. There is a redirect here and the audience gets a chance to think again. Now let's move the scene on. The scene is retried a number of times and several other members of the audience contribute suggestions. The Joker works very hard to involve as many people as possible in this collective process.

Joker: Pause. V1, your character seems to be a little…

V1: I didn't know if I could change it (*there is laughter and the Joker crosses the stage very deliberately to shake V1's hand*). I didn't know if I could change it in the scene. (Video Transcript, *Coulda/Shoulda*, 3rd show of this Mirror Theatre Tour)

The Joker shakes V1's hand because this insightful young person has confirmed the premise upon which the conversation is based: there are no easy answers in the conflicts of social interaction and we all must be vigilant in constantly thinking and

rethinking our behaviour and attitudes so that we do not misuse or abuse our power. This scene progresses through several further incarnations, more audience members join in, another volunteer joins the cast on stage and the plot thickens. The Joker, the actors and the audience thank V1 profusely for her fine work. Eventually the participants break out into workshop groups. When they return to the staging area, some of the groups replay the scenes they've worked on during the workshopping sessions. The scenes offer more suggestions to the collective mix of ideas that could resolve the conflicts in the future. Then, the Joker ends with:

Joker: It's a tough job. What I say to all of the groups is we're leaving you with homework for the next fifty years. You're going to face these situations many times in your life. I still face it every once in awhile with people my age. It's homework. And, I'd like to thank you [V1 and V2] very much for [helping us on stage]. (*A round of applause*). I feel optimistic [about] our conversations this morning. Good luck with it (*leads a round of applause for the audience. The hostess thanks the cast and lights go to black. Curtain*).

The Joker is grateful for their involvement, their intelligence and their common sense. All participants have been engrossed in an arts-based study re-searching their own lives, attitudes, actions and behaviours. He sets the homework for a lifetime and wishes them good luck.

The Joker's bag of tricks contains many more techniques, strategies and conventions. Which are engaged in any given show depends a lot on the audience, but the sense of purpose to effect change and the patterns of the process are always consistent with and relevant to the ultimate objective: *Through the comparison of one's beliefs with the beliefs of others a better understanding of our lives together can be achieved* (see Appendix 1).

As a high school English teacher, I'm obligated to teach essay writing skills. Without a doubt the essay is a student's worst nightmare and an English teacher's most challenging teaching assignment. Most students would rather I give them a step-by-step outline and tell them what to write. Some expect me to write their thesis statements. But one must fly in the face of mediocrity and brainless writing tasks and treat essay writing as any other form of writing: as an art form. The term essay has its origins in the oratory

of ancient peoples and comes from the Latin word, *exagium* meaning the act of weighing and relates to the definition of the verb to be, *essay*, meaning to put to a test. Anyone who tries to write an essay from a formula rather than from conviction is missing the point.

> The children in our classrooms come from diverse backgrounds, where values and beliefs of the family and community influence their thoughts, feelings and behaviours toward schooling. It is important for teachers to remember that all children bring with them a richness of experience from which to draw upon during the process of becoming literate. (Heller, 1995, p. 23)

So I trust in my students' abilities to engage their brains in the essay writing process. Not all students thank me for the favour, at least, not at first.

One student in a senior English class was particularly adamant that I was acting incompetently because I refused to do what was tantamount to writing his essays for him. As far as I was concerned, he had to write as if he had something to profess if he was ever to learn anything about essay writing or developing his analytical writing skills. The student thought he could pull the George Bernard Shaw card: "He who can, does. He who cannot teaches" on me, but I would not bite. He was going to learn how to write essays that came from his own mind, heart and soul. Oh and my response to dear Mr. Shaw is: *Those who can, teach; those who can't, shouldn't teach!* I defused the adversarial approach the student confronted me with and I patiently and persistently jokered our way into a working relationship that got us through the semester together. My purpose was clear and he learned to accept that writing good essays required some change on his behalf, but more importantly, he learned there is no be all and end all answer to an essay question; there is only *his way* of writing an essay that answers the question effectively.

He did very well in his final English exam, which required him to write two high-quality, well thought out essays in a couple of hours. He really was quite brilliant. He received an honours grade in English and went on to college the next year.

About mid-way through the next school year I received a letter from this student, which included the statement, "What has made a big difference is my attitude, a life lesson that I, believe it or not, learned in a large part from you through your example. The wisdom I received from you was how to have an open mind and consider the truth, you know, from another perspective." The change from his initial aggressive stance in my class and insistence that I wasn't teaching him enough is dramatic to say the least. He was now in college, he was excited about learning and thrilled about how I handled his English class. "Throughout last year I observed many times in both your interaction with myself and others, your willingness to have an open mind." For this student the proverbial light bulb had come on. "The most valuable information I received in English class was how to think with an open mind." Determination and sense of purpose and the wonder of this change in attitude combine to illustrate dramatically the magic that comes from seeing and believing that learning is a shared responsibility between teacher and student. "Dramatic acts relate to the learner's needs, purposes, and intentions and they ensure that the learner is attracted by and totally involved in the activity" (Courtney, 1989, p. 218).

Seeking purposeful change *for* those we teach and *inter-act* with can result in one of the most amazing impacts in our adventures as artists and educators in that we are likewise changed and enlightened. Two more of the essences of jokering are a sense purpose and change.

The Common Sense of Conscience

The concept of power and its variant degrees and potencies as the foundational underpinning of all human behaviour and interaction really didn't occur to me until I started this inquiry. The power a Joker or teacher might wield over audience members or a group of students psychologically, socially, politically, experientially and pedagogically had entered my thinking only as benevolent motivation, not as a force akin to charismatic manipulation. As educators, the only real power we have over people is what they perceived in us, right? Surely, we don't contemplate the use, misuse and abuse of power in our relations with others. In pondering, what seemed to me antithetical to teaching and jokering, I've come to realize that the reverse of what I initially thought is true: people use power in its myriad forms as part of their nature. It is the misuse and abuse of power they make choices about. When the Joker chooses to redirect a scene away from a workable solution offered by a member of the audience early in the show to avoid a premature resolution to the conversation or I choose to ignore the inappropriate behaviour of a student in the hallway to avoid a confrontation that later may influence my work with that student in the classroom, we're making powerful choices that dynamically affect educational outcomes for the people we work with.

The Joker believes that integral to the human condition is the need to feel empowered and that social interaction is driven by the dread of helplessness and the fear of a loveless life. It seems in the pursuit of happiness people will vie for position and status and use power in ways that suit their purposes. Status games are explored in scenes such as *Rumours* or the *Party* or *Dare*. *Rumours* and the *Party* have been described earlier in this thesis. *Dare* is a series of scenes about the risks people are willing to take to

relieve boredom or to remain popular within a peer group even when a dare escalates into a dangerous activity. In *Dare 1*, one character dares the others to pick Harry Potter jelly beans out of a bag taking the chance of ingesting a *vomit* or *booger* flavoured one. In *Dare 2*, the same character dares the others into choosing numbers out of five. If the chosen number is "correct" the character receives $20.00; if not, the character gets a hard slap in the face. In *Dare 3*, the dare is playing Russian roulette with a drinks tray. Four of the glasses contain tequila; the fifth contains wood alcohol. Scenes like these from *Fair Play Rulz* and *Coulda/Shoulda* reflect the one-upmanship behavioural patterns common amongst human beings, young and older. Rather than denying the natural inclinations people possess to use, misuse and abuse power, the Joker accepts this reality and encourages people to understand and consider how they might use their powers positively. Therein lies the Joker's common sense approach to power. Use power to do good rather than to hurt. This theme permeates the work of Mirror Theatre and reflects the collective conscience of the company. Those that doubt the Joker's sincerity can speculate upon hidden motives there may be lurking beneath the surface of these words, but my research did not uncover any ulterior motives. Jokering is not an easy job and there's no directive that compels anyone into this approach to teaching in the theatre or in the classroom, so, if the Joker disguises his true intent, I'd have to ask, to what end? Quite frankly, the experience is too strenuous and demanding to repeat over and over again after any personal or professional gain has been achieved. People use what powers they possess to advantage. This is common sense. Accepting this fact allows the Joker to set conversations about the power games or politics people play within the context of conscience so that the parameters, the consequences and the positive uses of power can

be defined, debated, explored and realized. Thus, common sense and conscience are essential to jokering.

In the following video transcript excerpt another status relationship is jokered from the *Party* scene described above. One of the guests to the party brings a younger sibling along at the behest and insistence of their parents. This guest is embarrassed by the sibling's presence and, of course, the sibling is so excited to be at a high school party sustaining any kind of *cool* is impossible. The older sibling insists the younger sit quietly and out of the way and rudely enforces this rule by physically forcing the younger sibling onto a sofa with the adamant instruction, "say nothing!" The younger sibling is intimidated into silence, but can't control the urge to enjoy the party in a *goofy* sort of way. The older sibling returns again and again to curb the younger sibling's enthusiasm. The audience in this show wanted to talk about this relationship:

Joker: (*Talking to the audience*) Okay? And also, if you get an idea, you [can] say, "hey I don't like that, there's an abuse or misuse of power," raise your hand... and what we'll do is [add your suggestion to the mix]. So, I'm going to say, rewind... they (the actors) love this part (*each actor physically backs up through the previous scene to start again*), okay (*bit of laughter*) ding dong!

Joker: (*The scene runs, then*) Pause. Yes? (*An audience member speaks*) what's goin' on (*the audience member continues*) yes, I's really misusing her power. What's your name?

A6: A6:

Joker: A6? Thanks, good observation. I want to hear what A6 is saying because he's distinguishing [between misuse and abuse of power]. [I] is not misusing, you're abusing your power.

I: Right.

Joker: What's the difference here?

A6: I don't know, she... (*continues inaudibly into laughter*).

Joker: Okay, but, is she enjoying putting her brother down and does she know she's hurting her brother.

Here the Joker moves the audience to the crux of the issue by pointing out I's lack of conscience. The antithesis in this scene rests in the Joker's non-judgemental approach to I's behaviour. I's treatment of her brother is not condemned outright. The Joker wants to talk about the situation and appeals to the collective common sense and conscience of the participants.

A6: Oh, probably.

Joker: Probably, that's when I would say it moves to abuse... you know, where if you don't know you're hurting somebody, you are misusing, but if you know you're hurting someone and still do it, you're abusing. What do you think we should say to I's character?

I: (*There's some chatter in the audience.*) You don't really know my brother. He is the nerdiest guy in school, like nobody talks to him. I can't believe he had to come with me.

Joker: Okay...

A7: Why'd you let him come?

I: Pardon me?

A7: Why'd you let him come?

I: Well, I had to. I was forced to. My parents told me that I couldn't come to the party... (*a general buzz in the audience ensues*).

J: Blackmail.

Joker: Yep. (*Lots of interaction here in the audience and on stage*) Okay, we got some good conversation going here, but if we had more time, [we'd redo] the scene [of] the conversation between Mom and Dad because Mom and Dad by forcing you [to bring your brother] started this difficulty. Adults have decisions [to make] as well. So, we're just not dumping on you, you have problems you've got to fix. We all have some issues we want to fix. How do you confront someone you know is hurting other people? The peacekeeper is the toughest job in the world. But we need more peacekeepers. (*Someone in front row speaks*) okay, did you hear that? So you think you should say, "I don't like the way you treat that person, it's not very nice" and you said, then she punches you back...

A7: And that solves nothing...

Joker: And that solves nothing and that's what we hear often, so, we [want you to] work this a little bit more. How can you be a peacekeeper that moves us to peace [because] sometimes trying to be a peacekeeper means risking getting punched in the face. (Video Transcript, *Coulda/Shoulda*, 3rd show of this Mirror Theatre Tour)

Acting conscientiously can be a risky endeavour. Standing on principle and doing the right thing requires a lot of common sense or the effort "solves nothing." "Conscience creates authenticity; we create our reality in drama through the consensus of our collective conscience" (Rieley, 1999, p. 124). The Joker confronts the participants with a mirror image of themselves. They can accept that mistakes are made and that people can make up for the hurts they may cause precisely because they are reflected in and reflecting upon familiar situations as presented on stage. Through free play and improvisation, the Joker draws and relies on strengths the participants possess, which they may or may not be aware of, to encourage them to reconsider their actions and to try to avoid hurtful behaviour. The scenes present characters who contextually act badly, even tragically, but the purpose is to face the participants with a reality they can discuss and deal with realistically. The audience, actors and Joker are together developing and learning the craft of purposeful and positive use of power. Jokering feeds on the audience's unconscious, perhaps secreted tendencies and belief systems, however negative their proclivities may be, and then, draws upon and trusts in their common sense, usually simmering just beneath the surface, to realistically confront the issues and deal with them.

The Joker's reflective powers and creative energies are used to generate a mutually beneficial character building and creative activity that investigates the interactions between the powerful and the powerless. The complexities of this relationship and its ramifications are apparent in the following excerpt from an interview with S. The scene we're talking about here is the race for the swings at recess in *Fair Play Rulz* and the rule in focus is *first come; first served.* The recess bell rings and one

character races out ahead of the others to get first dibs on the swing. Another arrives begging to get a turn on the swing, but the first there claims the swing by the right of playground rules for the whole recess. The second character comes up with a cunning plan. She offers to push the one on the swing, an offer the swinger accepts with relish. The pusher pushes harder and higher with each swing, until the one on the swing feels sick and has to get off: The pusher becomes the swinger and blissfully enjoys the swing. A third character arrives on the scenes and asks for a turn. The one on the swing calls out, "first come; first served!" The scene ends with the third character asking, "would you like a push…?" The actor, S, relates his understanding of the scene in the following excerpt:

S: Well, they [the audience] wanted to talk about the swing scene. They got up there and started doing it. Umm, wow, it happened so fast. Everything happened fast up there. I think what was going through my head was going back to grade one and the race to the swing. And the first one there was there. And you would be a fool to get down, a fool. What's the thrill? It's the thrill [that] you ran as fast as you could; you got to the chains the fastest. In that moment, getting the swing is first come, first served. I don't care. If you want to push me, okay but it's my call, it's my swing. Now if I stop, get off the swing to tie my shoe, it's… it's…

DHKB: …fair game.

S: …fair game. Now, that's what was going through my head. I see the line up of students [and realize] I was one of those students [waiting for the swing]. What happen is the buzzer would go for you to go back into school and maybe one or two people would rush to the swing for one quick swing before rushing off to class still. And no matter how hard you negotiated [you're still in] the line up [that] won't go.

DHKB: Is that a use, misuse or abuse of power?

S: It's a huge abuse of power, huge! Yeah. Saying to all your friends, "no, I won't share with you today." I can't remember who wrote 'Ramona Quimbey'…it's a Grade 4/5 level book and the character, Ramona, talks about getting the Lego in grade one class and playing with Lego. If you got the Lego that means you are quick. You did what had to be done that particular day and the stars aligned and it was your day. Today's your swing day. No one's going to take that away from you. They'll barter with you, they'll beg with you…for a few minutes, and then realize that you're not going to give it up.

DHKB: That's very interesting that you look from the other point of view, "well, so you have your day in the sun today and somebody else tomorrow."

S: Tomorrow I won't be quick. Maybe, it will take me three seconds longer to get my shoes tied up. Remember "G" and I were neck and neck. Three seconds longer and that swing is hers. Tomorrow when the stars align in her direction, that's her swing. And I'll barter with her, and I'll say, "can I push you?" and I'll say, "aw, come on, I'll make you a deal." Or "you can have five minutes and I'll have five minutes." But in the end, she's holding all the cards.

DHKB: Is it empowering? Is there a positive there? To be able to have the opportunity to negotiate? You have to actually negotiate because you have control?

S: Yeah. It is empowering. You know, suddenly you have the upper hand, as it were. And you get a lot of students who, or anyone who gets that one thing that they want, we'll use the example of the swing, you get the shy student who gets the swing. You're on top of the world, that day. That has totally made your day. No matter what happens, you'll go to bed at night and say, "I had the swing today! I never get the swing." Sure, I'm having a little swing but everyone's around me. I'll swing as high as I want to and they'll be around me and they're hoping maybe I'll fall off, but…yeah, I'm pretty popular.

DHKB: That's a very interesting way to see that scene. Do kids have to play through these rule games to know what is fair and what is fair game? Do they need to have these moments of power?

S: Yeah. They need to feel a little power. It builds confidence. But at times too they'll have that power and that power will be taken away from them, which is also important as a learning tool. I've had it taken away from me on occasion and [am I] crushed? Yeah. Does it hurt? Yeah. There's usually a lesson with that too. Perhaps they see two kids running towards that swing and one kid pushes the other one out of the way and gets to the swing. That's a power of having the swing and making fun of the other kid. You have the power, and then you abuse it by making fun of them. And what you need is a teacher to come along and say, "off the swing." Never again, when you get that swing will you ever make fun of anyone else. You got off the swing, lesson learned. (S., Personal Communication, May 8, 2002)

The scene provides an qualitative study of power relationships and sets in motion a conversation between teacher-actors who explore the variants of power along with all the other participants as they act or teach or reflect. "All power exists only in its expression. Expression is not only the manifestation of power but its reality" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 205). The fact that people use their powers or that people sometimes have power over others is not dismissed nor shunned. It's common sense and as long as *conscience is your guide*, the stars can align meaningfully for everyone now and again.

A colleague said of me once, "He brooks no foolishness and speaks the sometimes painful truth with a passion. Integrity is the key to his character," and a student wrote to me that I was a "tough teacher" who "pushed me the most, and I thank you for that because the best things that come out of life are the things you work hard for and you taught me how to do that." I'm completely humbled by these comments and I always feel a sense of discomfiture in what may seem to others as blowing my own horn, but I include them here to point out that the Joker or teacher has powers, given or assumed or undertaken, that must be used to effect. Common sense tells us that a Joker or a teacher persistent in the goal to make people think will make use of the powers of persuasion, personality, pedagogy and principle to effect learning. Another colleague in the school once accused me of gender bias against the girls in one of my English classes. This colleague had heard I read a poem in the class that was derogatory toward women and allowed the boys to laugh at the concepts contain within the poem. I didn't know what the colleague was talking about. I had recently read aloud poetry written by both the boys and girls in this class as I do in all my English classes. Not one of the poems was offensive to either gender; I would never read back any poem containing such offence and I had not sensed nor was I approached by any member of this class about this alleged insult against the girls. It turns out that no one in my class had raised the issue with this colleague. The colleague had overheard some hearsay from students not in my class who had heard one of the girls in my class talking about one of the poems I read aloud. A few boys found the poem funny and it seems this fact became the topic of conversation for the eavesdroppers. The rumour mill churned once and suddenly a few nervous chuckles turned into a crisis in the battle of the sexes. The colleague got wind of this

"conversation," and took the eavesdropping and a partial story to the principal claiming that I was denigrating the young women in my class. As soon as I was told of the complaint I confronted the accuser. A long story short, it was clear that this colleague had not a leg to stand on and that the so-called evidence was nebulous at best. I won't speculate here what this colleague's motivations were, but it was clear they had nothing to do with students, poetry readings or laughter in class. I threatened a grievance against this colleague through our professional teachers' organization and I expected an apology forthwith. The sheer force of my determination and the power of my convictions caused this colleague to reflect upon the accusations made against my integrity as a professional and my character as a person and the "case" unravelled. The claims dissolved into silence. Though lodging a grievance against a colleague would commit me to a gruelling, wholly unpleasant process of bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo and hardnosed politics, I was willing to take this step on a matter of principle and perhaps the colleague would learn something about conscience and common sense in the wake. I will stand for what I believe in, however politically incorrect. Fortunately, this colleague saw the light and I went back to classroom to read more poetry written by my students, to the delight of both genders, without missing a beat. I perceived an injustice and used my political and personal powers to affect a change in behaviour. Vindication had its rewards in self-respect and the admiration I gained from other colleagues and is its own source of power, but did I do good? My conscience is clear regarding this episode in my career and common sense tells me that had I let these false accusations escape scrutiny the effects on my psyche, professionally and personally, on the poetry lessons I offered students and on collegial ethics would have been, in my opinion, long lasting and catastrophic. In any

position of authority or influence, what tempers one's powers are the essential qualities of conscience and common sense.

The Honest Truth

The honest truth is that there are no easy answers to the vexing and perplexing issues that place human beings in conflict with each other. The Joker assigns homework at the end of each show to drive home the point that the discordant dissonances of human relations cannot be truly harmonized in a two-hour performance workshop. The Joker gets the conversation started in a dramatic and reflective way, but it's up to the audience to continue the dialogue and to apply their insights to their real lives. One of the teacher-actors said:

> H: I don't think we're [Mirror Theatre] that big, you know, that people are going to walk in here and see us and go, 'holy smokes! That's the most unbelievable thing I've ever seen. And I'm going to turn over a new leaf. I'm never going to hurt people again and I'm going to love everybody.' That's not going to happen. It doesn't mean that the play hasn't worked. Maybe we planted a seed. I don't think the mirror has to be [used] today when they see the show. Part of the process is [that] we aren't going to change the world today. (H., Personal Communication, May 10, 2002)

For the company, the art is in the process not the product. If the antics and actions reflected in the mirror are an honest representation of a reality the audience recognizes, what they may be able to do about it may come clearer upon further reflection while they live their lives.

> It is my relationship, as spectator, artist and percipient, to the dynamic interaction of form and focus. Meaning is found at the intersection of these two planes. The artist intuitively works the intersection of these two planes, creating knowledge in

> the process. Truth for the artist can only be known in retrospect, when the art making (not necessarily the art product) is complete. (Bundy, 1999, pp. 223–224)

After the show we all hope that the images presented and *re*-presented in the play will continue to haunt the audience as they consider what to do and what not to do.

> I argue for a new epistemology of practice, one that would stand the question of professional knowledge on its head by taking as its point of departure the competence and artistry already embedded in skilful practice—especially, the reflection-in-action (the 'thinking what they are doing while they are doing it') that practitioners sometimes bring to situations of uncertainty, uniqueness and conflict. (Schon, 1987, p. xi)

The Joker tries to pass on the practice of *reflection-in-action* to the audience during the play so that they may benefit from its potential transforming powers after they leave the theatre. This task is accomplished through questions that invite conversation and redirects that inhibit the natural inclination toward the *quick fix*. The jokering in the following excerpt is from *Fair Play Rulz*. The show opens with a scene titled *One of These Things*, which is based on the Sesame Street song of the same name. "One of these things is not like the other; one of these things just doesn't belong. Can you tell me which thing is not like the other before I finish my song." The Children's Television Network used this song on its award-winning, blockbuster hit TV show, to teach children how to differentiate between those things similar and those things different. Mirror Theatre uses the song to illustrate how kids are excluded from the group. The actors play characters on a playground involved in various normal playful activities while they sing the song. At the end of the verse, the Joker freezes the action, chooses one of the characters and then

invites the audience to point out how this character is different from the others. On the first go, the audience usually picks out physical differences or dissimilar clothing. The Joker takes several ideas from the audience and says to the chosen character, "sorry, you're too different, you don't belong, git outta here!" The audience usually senses the unfairness of this move and they fidget in there seats or audibly verbalize sounds like "ah" or "ooh" or giggle nervously, but the Joker asks, "That's right, isn't it? The rule is: if you're too different you don't belong, right?" The audience isn't sure how to react because they all know that this is a very real playground rule. The Joker then asks the audience to notice more subtle differences like behaviour, emotions and relationships this time. The song is sung again while the child characters play, the Joker freezes the action, and differences are pointed out about another character that is eventually sent off the playground for being too different. This singsong pattern is repeated until there is only one kid on the playground left—one lonely child. The Joker sits by this child and the conversation between them starts as follows:

Joker: Hm hm... so, do you think because people are different, they have to leave [the playground]?

I: No.

Joker: You don't like that rule?

I: No.

Joker: What would you prefer?

The question here is not, "why is it a bad rule?" or "why is it wrong to exclude others?" That could lead the character and the audience to trained responses and moralizing clichés. "What would you prefer?" invites an honest response.

I: Well, I'd rather have everybody come back, so, we can play… some more.

Joker: Okay. I'm going to ask the audience as well because you don't like being alone I take it?

Redirect. Because the Joker affirms and legitimizes the character's response, the audience, vicariously and intuitively, senses that the Joker will listen to what they have to say. There is a smooth segue to redirecting the focus into the audience.

I: No.

Joker: Okay, so you'd rather the people be back? (*To the audience*) So, what do you think of the rule that if someone is different [he or she] shouldn't belong?

A21: It's a bad rule.

Joker: Who's saying it's a bad rule? Okay, let's hear your idea first.

A21: Um, it hurts people's feelings.

Joker: It hurts people's feelings, so, everyone I put back here (*indicating the back of the audience where the characters excluded from the playground are standing*), you think their feelings were hurt?

The truth is not imposed; it comes into the play with a member of the audience. The question is interrogative and inviting because it asks for what the audience member thinks. A declarative statement like, "their feelings are hurt, so the rule is bad," could stifle the conversation and shut the scene down at this point.

A21: Yeah.

Joker: Okay, I'm going to ask E. Have your character come up for a second. Do you want to ask her if her feelings were hurt?

A13: I will.

Redirect, this time by someone else in the audience. The conversation is no longer just about what one or two people think. This audience member has re-entered the conversation after listening for a while.

Joker: What's your name?

A13: A13.

Joker: A13? Okay, A13, ask her a couple of questions about her character.

The question and answer process is being lead by the audience, the body politic in the school community that might effect change amongst the members of that community given the chance.

A13: Umm… were… you sad when he asked you to leave?

E: Yeah, yeah… I was.

Joker: Anyone else who would like to ask her a few questions? What's your name?

A6: A6.

Joker: Sorry…

A6: A6.

Joker: A6: Sorry, it's the bells [from his Joker hat] in my ears. (*Audience laughs*) Okay, what would you like to ask her?

A6: Why would you be upset because there's still one person up there?

The example having been set, the questions from the audience remain inviting and conversational and probe the issues of loneliness and exclusive behaviour with sensitivity and concern.

E: Well, I guess… the more the merrier? And when, you're all playing all together at recess or lunch it's a lot more fun when there's more people, so, the less people, you can't play… games as well as you could with a larger group. Does that answer your question? (*The pupil nods, yes.*)

Joker: But my questions with all of this, did E ever belong even when everybody was on stage?

Audience: (*Various yeahs and yeses.*)

Joker: Let's take a look again. I'd like all the actors to come back on stage for a second. And let's take it from the very beginning and watch E's character. Does she even belong when the whole crowd is there? Ready, play.

Redirect. The Joker jokingly jokers the audience into a deeper analysis of the behaviour, rules and issues they've witnessed.

(*The actors go through the song again in character.*)

Joker: Pause! What's E's character… Yes? (*An audience member pops up a hand*) What did you notice?

A13: She's shier.

Joke: She's a little bit shier. So, do you feel you belong even when the whole crowd is here E?

E: No.

Joker: Why not?

E: Because, nobody talks to me… like, when they play… H and I will say "yoohoo, hi" [*to each other*] but nobody says "hi" to me when we play. (*Laughter in the audience.*)

Joker: Hm hm… (*to the audience*) any suggestions or thoughts about that? What could or should E do or what could or should the other characters do? (*Notices A4's hand*) Yes?

A4: You could ask them to talk to her more?

Joker: Okay… uh… (*an audience member tells the Joker that he should let the actors relax; they've been held in a freeze by the Joker's imaginary remote control*) oh okay, relax… I should have pressed the relax button. Very good audience. Okay, come on down F. Any suggestion to F's character about how he treats E's character? Yes? What should F's character do for E's character.

A20: Like, if he passed her, say "hi."

Joker: If you pass her just say, "hi." Can we make that suggestion to everyone?

A20: Yep!

Joker: Okay, so in other words…

H: I don't want to.

The Joker has audience members directly involved in problem solving and solution building. As the Joker would expect, one of the actors initiates the redirect away from simplistic solutions. The Joker and the actors working in concert spontaneously and intuitively to keep the participants thinking, rethinking, reworking and exploring the implications of being excluded.

Joker: What's that?

H: I don't wanna!

Joker: You don't want to… okay, we'll come to your character in a minute.

Joker: I would like everyone to see if you can include E's character a bit more. (*To the audience*) Who'd like to say play? Okay… you, were loud this time. In a big loud voice say, "play!"

A22: Play!

(*And the song goes again.*)

Joker: Pause. Did anyone help? (*To E*) did that feel any better?

E: No

Joker: No?

E: Nobody went by or said, "hi."

Joker: Nobody went by or said, "hi."

J: But, she didn't go by us either!

Joker: Oohhhh…

There is a glimmer here that the suggestions from the audience are starting to show some effect.

I: She has to say, "hi" too!

Joker: (*To J*) what was that?

J: She didn't go by us either. I and I were going towards her and she walked away from us.

I: Yeah, totally!

Joker: Okay, so, in order to have this friendly place, it's not just up to them (*to audience*) it's also up to E's character?

Here, the Joker presents the antithesis to the thesis that one way to help is for others to be friendly and make E feel welcome. There is a ring of truth to the suggestion that the situation requires interventions from both sides.

Audience: (*Assorted yeps.*)

Joker: We're going to give you one more chance… okay… ready? Everyone, ready? A little friendlier to everybody… yeah, (*the Joker reinforces the solutions offered by an audience member*) is that you're suggestion?

A23: Play!

(*And away we go again.*)

Joker: Pause. And, relax. So, E, what happened this time?

E: I've lots of friends now. (*General laughter from cast and a bit in the audience.*)

Joker: A little overwhelming now? But that's very good and I want to thank you as audience members because what you're beginning to do is think how we can make the playground a little more friendly. (Video Transcript, *Fair Play Rulz*, 1st show of this Mirror Theatre Tour)

"Pedagogy becomes revolutionary when it provides images of what could be and raises more questions than answers" (Barber

> *Chandler, & Collins, 2001, p. 37). The Joker has moved the audience toward the ending of this part of the jokering without formalizing any particular solution—which may be frustrating for those in the audience looking for easy answers or the concreteness of moral judgement. The Joker will not be drawn into a happy ending motif and must remain honest and true to the audience. A contrived resolution to the issues presented and discussed in this scene could smash the mirror and create a distorted picture of life.*

June Cottrell's brilliant description of questions that invite reflects vividly the Joker's technique.

> Questions that will stimulate, probe, and explore must allow for options. Does she ask many questions that allow options, for which there can be several 'right' answers? Do the questions encourage the child to make inferences as well as furnish facts? Are the questions really probing for ideas and feelings or are they, in fact, rhetorical? Do the questions reveal her respect for the ideas and feelings of the children? Do they show that she really listens? (Cottrell, 1987, pp. 37–38)

Qualities underlying the Joker's questioning techniques include honesty, a genuine interest in the lives and ideas of others and faith in the philosophy that truth is arrived at collectively.

> A person skilled in the 'art' of questioning is a person who can prevent questions from being suppressed by the dominant opinion. A person who possesses this art will himself search for everything I favor of an opinion. Dialectic consists not of trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength.(Gadamer, 1999, p. 367)

I've developed and practiced the *art of questioning* in all aspects of my teaching and jokering. I have found effective questioning techniques particularly useful during the audition process for extracurricular school productions. In *sensing out* a performer's

dedication to quality, commitment and teamwork, questions that invite candid conversation can be invaluable. The interview is often far more revealing than the prepared act they bring to the audition. As with the Joker, my objective is to involve as many people as I possibly can in the production without setting them up for disappointment or placing them on stage before they're ready to face a critical audience. Three students in wheelchairs performed brilliantly in a recent production under my direction. I don't think they would have considered auditioning had I not pursued their participation. They had lived the consequences of stereotyping so long that auditioning for a school production didn't occur to them. I taught them in three separate drama classes where I observed their love of drama. Other students often treated them as if they weren't there, but I wasn't having that. I expected them to participate fully in the activities of the class and I insisted other students adapt creatively to their needs.

Their confidence levels increased exponentially with each class. Auditions were coming up and I was pretty sure each of the three would enjoy being part of the show and I knew they could handle themselves well in performance. I found appropriate moments to ask them different variations of the same question, "if you were in a show, what part would you want to play?" They knew a show was pending and the ads for audition dates were up around the school, but not one had considered taking part… until that moment. All responded spontaneously to the question with, "I don't know; I'd never thought about it." "Why not?" I asked. Each was taken aback and surprised they'd be considered as performers. I shared a few ideas I had about what I thought they could do and then asked, "What do you think?" Well, their hearts burst forth and conversations filled with hope and possibility ensued with each of them and soon we had established the acts they'd be

cast into. I had to be honest with them. "Do *you* feel you're up to the challenge?" The rigours of performance would demand a lot of their physical energies and command a lot of their time and facing an audience for the first time wouldn't be easy for any of them. Their parents would also have to be onside. "How would you feel in front of a large demanding audience? What if you flubbed a line or they laughed when you didn't expect them to?" I was not trying to discourage them, but I was making them think before they leapt; however, there was no turning them back now and they knew I believed they could do it and that I'd be there to help them prepare. All chose comedy and they performed brilliantly in two separate hilarious sketches, one as a *sit-up* comedian. The Joker's *what if* questioning technique opened the floodgates and their creativity, rapier wit and love for the stage cascaded out of them to the delight of all in the audience and the others who participated the show. They were exhausted after the run of the show, but they'd prepared themselves for this eventuality. They all thanked me for the opportunity and one said, "I feel more confident in myself now. You made me understand that I have to step forward and not let people treat me like I don't exist." Honesty truly was the best policy and the truth was *they could do it* and, of course, they did. All they needed was the Joker in the classroom to invite them to *play*.

Learning to Grow

The reality that who we are has such a powerful influence on what we do, how we teach and why we joker and ultimately on those we work and play with, necessitates ongoing reflection upon our beliefs, practices, behaviours and the principles by which we live our lives. The agenda one enters the classroom or the theatre with, including the

curricula or issues one is dealing with and the amalgam of one's experiences and training, past and present, will dramatically affect the impact the teaching or the jokering has on the learner and self-reflexively on the Joker or teacher as well. Professional and personal experiences, beliefs, concepts, ideas and ways of being and doing require updating, revision and contemplative analysis to remain relevant, vigorous and vital. Students respond to a teacher or Joker socially, intuitively and evocatively in tune with their needs, their interests and their lives. Ongoing and pedagogical research, professional development, artistic endeavour, soul searching or *soul re-searching* are germane to remaining vital in one's work and keeping the learning curve vigorously arced.

"Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other" (Freire, 2000, p. 72). In addition to ongoing pedagogical development, the Joker believes that knowledge is informed and expanded through a self-conscious awareness of what experience brings to learning. Learning to grow moment to moment is a tremendous asset to a teacher or a Joker. Even in the run of a show, one performance may inform and influence the next. "It's interesting how the morning show gives you some insights for the afternoon show and [keeps you] fine tuning. I felt it dragged on a bit" (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May 8, 2002). Review, reflection and rethinking happens while I'm teaching and though the content of a lesson may be the same next time around, the approach and the techniques utilized may be very different. The curriculum is the personal growth and educational development of students or participants and the target subject or issue the vehicle by which we're driven to higher learning and an expanded knowledge base.

> Joker: They still have to be intuitive and every once in a while that intuitive thinking comes out and [you] go, "wow." That's a Joker's role too. It's up to the Joker to structure the scenarios in which potential learning can take place. Just like the teacher. It's not about you teaching them, it's about structuring a scenario where learning can take place. So, my job as a teacher is to design lessons that I know the students can learn from. [Which is] far more divergent than [departments of education] or anybody else says. I know I can design them so that people can learn. So when you're in a scene you have to respond in such a way that something can happen. (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May 17, 2002)

A subject may be entirely pertinent to a learner's future, but even if it's not, the value of taking on the rigour and discipline of a structured educational experience is in learning to grow, to take advantage of the scholastic opportunities one is afforded and to develop the practice of life-long learning, not just in the subject or topic itself.

> This paper then takes us into the realm of what I have called 'enlightened decision making' (Norris, 1989) that I now rephrase as 'informed decision making.' The role of Joker is not only to continue to playfully question, 'What if…?' This paper then closes with the way in which I close many of our programs: 'One of our earlier plays was called, 'No Easy Answers.' Many of the decisions that we make are difficult ones. We hope what we have presented to you will assist you in the tough decisions that you will have to make. You have our best wishes.' The cast applauds the audience and thanks them for their thoughts and input. Such is the constructivist approach to reflective practice. (Norris, 2002, p. 24)

The Joker's design is to "assist" participants in helping themselves to personal growth. English or Drama or Bullying are obviously important subjects, but it's how one uses the language or what one learns about oneself through drama or if one can become less of a bully that constitutes the real learning and matters most.

> T: I had a teacher that talked to us about how a teacher should not just stand in front of a class and lecture for three hours or an hour and a half or whatever and leave them because only 10% of [the lecture] they will remember. And the irony was that [the teacher] stood there and talked for three hours, lecturing us about how

> you shouldn't stand and lecture. It was so ironic because that's probably the 10% of what I remember about that class. Doing [jokering] in the classroom is not hard. Organizing something like this in the regular classroom in any subject practically is not difficult. I think a teacher is a Joker anyway. They do a lot of organizing and they are, you know, hugely connected to the students and [they] move them around and alter them and change situations and still come out saying, "this is what I can do for you. This is what I have to teach you. I can't finish your life for you. You're on to the next teacher. You're on to your next life experience."

DHKB: That's a very interesting insight.

T: And that's what Mirror Theatre is. We say as a recap, "finish your life. This is all we can give you right now. This is all we know about right now. So, go out there and learn something else. Somebody else will have to teach you more." (T., Personal Communication, May 9, 2002)

We can't finish anyone's life for them nor is what we teach or joker the be all and end all of learning. It's just one in many life experiences from which students and participants will grow and learn.

By example, the Joker teaches us we don't know it all and that there is always something more to learn. John Dewey, scholar in the epistemology of learning and teaching said, "a student cannot be *taught* what he needs to know, but he can be *coached*" (Schon, 1987, p. 17). The Joker coaches his team—the audience, the cast and the organizers—into an independent learning pattern to provide opportunities for self-learning and growth and the Joker models this exemplar pattern in his coaching, his jokering and his teaching.

> I do not summarize with my meta-narrative but let the stories speak for themselves. There are few definitive techniques that a Joker and all who subscribe to a constructivist and emancipatory pedagogy can apply. Each individual and context is varied and as such each decision is unique to that individual and context. However, as practitioners this does not absolve us of the consequences of our actions and moves us into the realm of relativism. Schon

> (1983) and Connelly and Clandidnin (1988) remind us that as professionals we have responsibility to reflect on our experiences. (Norris, 2002, p. 23)

Whatever works for one Joker may not work for another; therefore, the style and kind of jokering will depend on the practitioner working within a particular context. However, the standard of jokering relies on actions and attributes such as continuously moving forward through the qualities of the experience, practicing life-long learning, embracing personal growth as a mantra and developing a reflective narrative.

During my career, which spans almost thirty years now, I've had a few poems written by students and dedicated to me. One poet wrote:

> *Thank you for your kindness*
> *For without it I would not be the person I am today*
> *You have shown me what a simple word*
> *A smile, a kind gesture or a gentle push can do.*

Kindness, simple words, kind gestures, smiles and hope are not part of the lexicon of curriculum guides. One cannot forget that the curriculum guide is a policy or an outline, not a practice. I learned early in my career that the example I set for my students and myself and the ways in which I enlivened the curriculum were more important by far to my students than what I was teaching. The same student wrote in a letter accompanying the poem, "When I see my teacher working as hard as the students are it gives me encouragement to work just as hard or harder." The Joker is dedicated to the kind of self-analysis change requires and so am I. By knowing, defining and modelling the rules or the disciplines or the principles or the expectations we bring into the classroom or the theatre with us and practicing what we preach, we have a far greater impact on the people we touch and on the curriculum we teach. Embracing life-long learning and stimulating personal growth are essences of jokering and teaching.

A Faithful Trust

Intrinsic to the interconnectedness of all essences of jokering is a faithful trust in the reflective power of the mirror and the capacity of the audience to improve the lifeworld in which they live. The following excerpt is what the Joker tells the audience at the end of each show after the jokering is all done:

> Joker: With the *Safe and Caring Schools* [program] the two key words are safe, and caring… what we believe we did today [was] show you some scenes where it wasn't very safe for some people and it wasn't very caring. You helped us create another play that was safer and more caring… it wasn't perfect… that was tough, but it's… manageable, it's doable. We're now giving you homework…
>
> A17: No!
>
> Joker: (*Chuckle*) And, your homework is to use the scenes in the play to try to make your school more safe and what you did do is come up with a lot of good answers, a lot of good suggestions. So, we want to thank you for all your good work this morning (*a round of applause lead by the actors and the Joker*). The harder part isn't [what we do] up on stage; the harder part is when you go back to your classrooms and your schoolyards and your homes and try to live some of [your ideas] there. So, we wish you very well and thank you, you've been a great audience. (Video Transcript, *Fair Play Rulz*, 1st show of this Mirror Theatre Tour)

"We must give different sides of the picture/argument and trust the audience members to make appropriate decisions in their own contexts" (Norris, 1999, p. 273). During the run, one of the students who had joined the cast on stage in the *Party* scene of *Coulda/Shoulda* was involved in a violent altercation regarding a rumour at the lunchtime following the show. *Rumours* was one of the other scenes in the show. This student was absolutely brilliant in the jokering of the scene during the show and helped to make the show work for the audience, but after the show it seems that someone took umbrage at a rumour that was being passed around school and a fight ensued. Whether the student was on the receiving end of or telling the rumour is not entirely clear, but the situational irony did not escape the purview and contemplation of a Joker and cast. Another bit of nasty

news arrived during the week of the run. Two students of a school that the company had performed in about a year previously had been arrested for bullying another student of the same school. Of course, the central issue that was the subject of this show was bullying. Circumstances such as these could shake one's faithful trust in the reflective process and the common and moral sense of the audience could be shaken to its very footings. All members of the company are realistic about the limitations of their work. A theatre company from afar cannot expunge the negative undertones from the cultural milieu of a community in a week, in a year or at all. In a quote previously entered into this thesis H summed it up best, "I think we fool ourselves if we think we're going to walk in here and that there won't be a fight at lunchtime" (H., Personal Communication, May 10, 2002). However, the Joker's faith and the actor's trust are not diminished. In fact, the company may only reach a few, but change has a ripple effect and the hope that someone's life might be improved keeps all members of the company enthusiastically involved in the process.

At the end of the evening show an adult member of the audience felt compelled to comment:

> A4: I really appreciate this and this is good. One thing I found over the last seven years I've been a counsellor is that we're not [well versed] in the art of how to listen and we're not in the art of how to communicate. I've see many of the students here are going into education, into teaching and that is something that is very, very necessary. Even with our own families... sometimes we don't know how to communicate with our kids? So it's nice to see this.
>
> Joker: And the nice thing that I see is we've gone to many schools and communities and most kids do a great job and I'm not [just] talking about them, I'm looking at some of them right here who came back for a second time tonight. That's where the hope lies too. It's maybe where some of the issues lie, but that's [also] where the hope lies, so thank you. We all can be part of the solutions. They're not big things, but every once in awhile they can blow up to be big things. (Video Transcript, *Coulda Shoulda/Fair Play Rulz*, 5th show of this Mirror Theatre Tour)

Therein lies the hope that solutions to social problems can be found or formulated even by young people and that we might affect the young in a positive way is reason enough to have faith in the process.

The Joker is haunted, as hopefully the audience will be, by incidents or scenes about people hurting each other intentionally and tries to incorporate what can be learned from the experience of others into the show.

> Joker: Good morning. We're going to show you a play this morning that we don't like. We wrote it, we're very proud of it, but we don't like it. (There are a couple of giggles from the audience) I mean that and I say that and I'm going to be working lights back there and some of the scenes I see on stage every once in awhile, my stomach begins to turn. So, what we're going to do is we're going to show you a number of scenes and then, what we're going to ask you to do is help us rewrite them. If you watched the news last night [you might have heard that] two young women were charged with bullying. Kind of sad… it's even sadder, we were there last year [at their school]. And we had this type of conversation with them. We're taking a look at all kinds of pressures that people your age said they were experiencing. So, we're giving you a sort of challenge today [so this doesn't happen here]. The name of the show is called Coulda/Shoulda and in a minute the actors will come out and perform, but, as I said, we're proud of the play. It makes a lot of people think. We don't like it. It's your job to help us fix it. Thanks. (Video Transcript, *Coulda/Shoulda*, 3rd show of this Mirror Theatre Tour)

The Joker has turned a negative into positive and maintains the faith in the thinking and healing powers of the audience.

For Mirror Theatre, the typical conclusion doesn't rest with us. Our programs are used to assist people in articulating daily events that concern them. In fact we tell them that the drama will continue, once they leave the performance space. One of the questions we ask is, 'Based upon our play, what will you Stop, Start or Continue doing in your daily lives?' We trust our audience to use the play to

> initiate change and through our 'workshopping' performances, we start them on their way. (Norris, 2001, p. 127)

The requests for Mirror Theatre performances and the acclaim this company receives increase each year, so much so that the company can't keep up with demand. Mirror Theatre has been in existence for ten years and performed at the Edmonton Fringe Festival in August 2000, in Victoria on Vancouver Island in October 2001 and at NYU in July 2003 with several tours and local gigs in between. There's not much money in working for a week on the road, rehearsals are long and demanding, the accommodations are shared and nominal and the audiences needy. People outside the dramatic loop of Theatre in Education might wonder why the Joker and his cast take on such responsibility. The work is exhausting and always over and above the day jobs of both the Joker and the actors; yet, they continue. Why? I believe they trust in the reflective powers of the mirror and they have a chance to make a difference in the lives of participants.

> The long-term effects of jokering and of teaching are mostly unknown, and of course, the critics would have us believe that neither activity should be taken seriously. We seem to be caught up in a positivistic language of cause and effect. While many of the participants and I can say 'the program was worthwhile,' 'effectiveness' would call for pre and post-tests and control and treatment groups. The issues that we are dealing with are far more complex than this. A particular person may gradually cease an unwanted behaviour after comparing it with a scene in the play. This is our wish, but this is difficult to determine. I would prefer the questions, 'How did the participants value the play and workshops?'

> and, 'Did the program begin good discussions on violence in everyday life?'
>
> (Norris, 1999, p. 281)

I believe we can only know what influence we've had on people by what they tell us. I recently received an e-mail from a student I taught almost 17 years ago. This student is a professional actor now and I've followed his career with great interest and admiration from afar, but I had not heard from him since he left high school. The student wrote:

> *Of course, it goes without saying, that you indeed were very pivotal in the re-direction of my life back in 1986 and for that I thank you. As a result of that, almost seventeen years later, I am still, proudly, a Canadian actor. Most of the time I'm a Canadian actor playing Americans in American T.V., but its all relative. My way to creative redemption has always been at the purifying well of the theatre or independent film. Thank God for that. I was just thinking the other day that you were the one who planted it in my head that I could do this. I certainly didn't. To be honest with you, I was incredibly shy, and continue to be. But it was you who threw it out there that 'dream' thing. And after that, my life has never been the same. I was a very angry, frightened, frustrated and misunderstood young man. The outlet of acting offered me something nothing else has ever come near. What I am trying to say is that the most important things I learned as an actor were the things I learned in the black box [drama room], turntable spinning in the background, and yourself offering an alternative to the mundane.*

So… you just never know. I believed in this student all those years ago and I used every personality development exercise there is in that "black box" to draw the student out along with classmates. The student didn't have to be rid of shyness, just to know that the potential was there to achieve a dream. There's no greater accolade for a teacher or a Joker than an unsolicited and honest tribute from a student or audience member, but neither continues a life's work for such heart warming and soul invigorating commendations. As teachers and Jokers in our classrooms we work because we have faith in our abilities to teach and trust the capacities of the people we work with to learn.

A Free and Playful Love

The performance of the Joker is improvisational and dance-like. Metaphorically, the Joker dips and weaves and capers and trips the light fantastic while working the audience. Sometimes leading, sometimes following, but mostly improvising somewhere in between. Prompted by the dramatic impulses emanating extemporaneously from the audience, the Joker dances about the performance space weaving in an out of the audience then, onto the stage and off again at once be-*mused* and a-*musing*. The Joker operates as the playful sprite, the loving muse dancing with the audience in an artful synchronicity. The twists, the spirals, the reverses and the spins are all part of the fun and of the purpose. "The muse presents raw bursts of inspiration, flashes and improvisatory moments in which the art just flows out. But also presents the technical, organizational job of taking what we have generated, then filing and fitting and playing with the pieces until they line up" (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 108). The Joker dances the audience onto the dance floor, teaches them a new step or two, learns a few as well and then dances them right out the dance hall door hopefully to continue dancing around and through the issues reflected in the mirror and gracefully made manifest by the Joker's dance.

Philosophically motivating the Joker's dance is the concept of *free play.* In his groundbreaking and seminal book *Free Play: The Power of Improvisation in Life and the Arts*, Stephen Nachmanovitch writes, "This whole enterprise of improvisation in life and art, of recovering free play and awakening creativity, it's about allowing ourselves to be true to ourselves and our visions, and true to the undiscovered wholeness that lies beyond the self and the vision we have today" (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 177). Free play is improvisation without inhibition, without self-consciousness and without the fear of falling on one's backside on the dance floor. "The heart of improvisation is the free play

of consciousness as it draws, writes, paints and plays the raw material emerging from the unconscious. Such play entails a certain degree of risk" (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 9). The Joker enters the theatre with no preconceived notions of success or how the show might go and places himself in the hands of the audience trusting them to reflectively, intuitively and intelligently journey with the Joker into new realms of understanding and exploring ways of *being*. "Free play has been, for the last fifteen years, a strong metaphor for my life" (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May 17, 2002). The show could fall flat on its face and so could the Joker, figuratively speaking, but the audience is invited to dance with the Joker. The Joker risks their rejection time and time again. I haven't witnessed a show yet where the audience has refused to dance. They play along freely without even realizing it. Not even the *too cool to move* kids sitting at the back of the hall can resist his charm.

What is it that causes the Joker to risk energy, confidence and integrity time and again? Likewise with the many other professional and personal commitments and pursuits of the teacher-actors, there must be something more to this dedication to a very demanding process designed more for the benefit of others than their own. I believe free play is definitely an essence in the work of the company, but is love? This excerpt from an interview with H, I think, sheds some light in this matter.

> H: I think a lot of people who get up [onto the stage] are victims, are left out, are often the ones who don't really fit into the cool, accepted social groups.
>
> DHKB: Why would they feel safe enough to come up here?
>
> H: Because they have nothing to lose. They're already outcasts. I mean people on the top end of the spectrum and people on the bottom end of the spectrum never have anything to lose, I think. It's the people in the middle, you know, maybe it's like [the Joker] says, it's the witnesses that we really need to work on. But those who are [in the middle]…I bet you half of them, or more, would get up if they thought their buddy would do it. Where these ones don't necessarily have to

> worry about their buddies…they don't have any…do it anyway, because again, what do they have to lose? I think the victims really see themselves clearly in the mirror onstage.
>
> DHKB: But do they continue to be victimized? Do they continue to feel like that?
>
> H: I've heard it in the jokering so often with a student who [stands] up in [the] show who [is] obviously extremely offended by something that was said because she probably heard that as [a] student and was extremely upset. The very first time I saw the Shower [Girl's Locker Room[8]] scene I went, "holy smokes!" And 'A3' was sitting beside me at the time and she turned to me and goes, "that is so true." And she's like, "I was the middle girl." And so, I think it's there. How much we're going to hear about it is the problem because we can't get the resolution. You can't take every single person out of the show and sit down and interview them on a one on one without anyone else knowing that you're going to do it so, they feel comfortable enough to be honest with you and to really think about it. (H., Personal Communication, May 10, 2002)

Concern for the underdog or the people who suffer the consequences of bullying simply because they don't fit in or they are different in one way or another is a loving act. Reflecting the reality of their lifeworlds to such effect that some are compelled to get up or speak out to express their distress and anger requires an experienced empathetic understanding on the part of the Joker and the actors of the plight of those who "have nothing to lose." "Empathy is the ability to don the shoes of another human being" (Eisner, 1998, p. 37) and *pathos*, one of the root words of empathy refers to "an experience or a work of art that arouses feelings of tenderness or sorrow." An actor may use Stanislavski's *System* or Strasburg's *Method* to become very real or natural in a role as part of perfecting his or her craft, but in this company the craft is primarily in engaging the audience in discussing or perhaps, improving, their lives, not in the characterization or in the acting alone. In fact, as aforementioned the Joker is very adamant that the process is not about scenes and characters, but rather about the audience. So why would

[8] A description of the *Girls Locker Room* appears earlier in the thesis.

the Joker or the actors take part in a theatre that is antithetical to the reason most actors act?

> Beyond the drive to create is yet a deeper level of commitment, a state of union with a whole that is beyond us. When this element of union is injected into our play-forms, we get something beyond mere creativity, beyond mere purpose or dedication; we get a state of acting from love. Love has to do with the perpetuation of life, and is therefore, irrevocably linked to deeply held values. (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 185)

For whatever reason, they take a sincere and dedicated interest in the lives of people they've not met before the show begins because they want to and think they can help. Their talent is in caring enough to make a difference. Without even knowing if the reflections and refractions of the mirror have had any effect at all they continue to try, to spend enormous energies and *to give it up* for the audience, which I believe together constitutes a loving *act*. One of the Mirror Theatre cast related experiences in this regard this way:

> J: I don't know how other people look at it but from personal experience considering what I went through growing up, most of my life experience didn't come from the classroom, didn't come from Mom and Dad. Most of my life experience was learned on the street. And there are times where I wish I didn't have it because I look back and I think, "geez, you know, in my life I suffered an awful lot. Why did I have to go through it?" But at the same time, someone else could be experiencing it for the first time. [The] simple act of being able to bring two pieces together is usually what escapes most of us. I pay attention. And sometimes just paying attention is the difference between life and for some people even death. If we're able to reach [out to], how [the Joker] puts it, 'a handful of kids' then we've done our job. But if we're able to reach out to everybody, boy, that's something. That would be something. (J., Personal Communication, May 9, 2004)

That *is* something. This actor has empathy for those that suffer the pain others inflict. From personal experience this actor has gained insights that others may not have and with

those insights feels the actor might help others. "Reflection is the only thing that makes drama worth doing. If you cannot increase reflective power in people, you might as well not teach, because reflection is the only thing that in the long run changes anybody" (Wagner, 1976, p. 77). Drama is reflective and a healing process for this actor who hopes the experience will be therapeutic, especially for those at imminent risk. This actor believes that the reaching out might allow participants to realize someone else knows what they're going through. "Far from being an escape from life, art is a deep involvement in life, one that enriches the participant now and afterward" (McClasin, 2000, p. 258). That the actor's offer is unconditional and an embedded dedication to the audience and the hope for the betterment of other lives is a kind of love.

"So the dance can only exist if the Joker is between the pulls. They [students or audience members] are focussed on the Joker as the Joker tries to make sense of it all and confuses it deliberately every once in awhile" (T. Joker, Personal Communication, May 17, 2002). The Joker dances with the audience through the thesis and antithesis of the issues and involves as many people as is possible in the shindig, flitting and jigging from one audience member to a volunteer on stage to an actor and around and back again. The Joker plays freely and skilfully works the audience as deeply as possible into the mirror's reflection. At the same time the Joker reflects on personal performance and practice as a Joker, an educator and actor-participant. Thus, we returned to Schon's concept of self-reflection, professionally and personally. "A skilled performer can integrate reflection-in-action into the smooth performance of an ongoing task" (Schon, 1987, p. 29). The Joker wishes to be *in the moment* and at peak performance for the audience and while jokering,

the Joker is actively involved in research studying the power of the mirror, professional practice, the reactions of the teacher-actors and the interplay of the participants.

> Research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being. To care is to serve and to share our being with the one [or the ones] we love. We desire to truly know our loved one's very nature. And if our love is strong enough, we not only will learn much about life, we also will come face to face with its mystery. (van Manen, 1998, pp. 5–6)

However tired we may be or busy we've been or stressed we are, the Joker and the actors rise to the occasion and give their all. Why? Well, my belief is… for the free and playful love of it all.

In the article titled, *Transcendence and the Curriculum*, Philip Phenix argues "that human consciousness is rooted in transcendence" as a "fundamental presupposition of the human condition" (Phenix, 1976, p. 328). In other words, by virtue of being human, students enjoy and are intrigued by experiences that take them beyond the mediocre, the usual or the norm into realms where they can more often respond to the learning with words like, *that's really cool* or *sweet!* Variety, change, innovation, inspiration, novelty, challenge, risk and discipline truly are the spices of life and of learning in the classroom and in the theatre. These ingredients mixed with a cup or two of kindness and care from a dynamic, knowledgeable and enthusiastic teacher can move students to "the consciousness of limitless possibility of going beyond in degrees of excellence" (p. 328).

I hope I do "affirm transcendence" in my professional and personal life. In my earlier twenties, I intentionally set out on a voyage of discovery through which I have

sought to do, to experience, to travel, to teach and to be as much as I possibly can. I do have a passion for learning and a thirst for knowledge and I am genuinely interested in everything and everyone. As a person I crave educational encounters that transport and transform my perceptions and perspectives and as a drama and English teacher and like the Joker, I prefer synergic learning experiences that facilitate greater insight and understanding for both teacher and student. I ask my students to trust me and to take a leap of faith with me into learning experiences that, I hope, go beyond the norm. "A curriculum of transcendence provides a context for engendering, gestating, expecting and celebrating the moments of singular awareness and of inner illumination when each person comes into the consciousness of his inimitable personal being" (Phenix, 1976, p. 333). My students never cease to amaze me with their insights, their abilities, their reasoning, their creativity and their honesty. But, I would not ever see nor be inspired by the depths of their personalities if students were not encouraged to transcend previously held notions, to seek knowledge beyond what is required and to find something within themselves they like and didn't know they had. I trust I have the "fundamental humility manifest in expectant openness to fresh creative possibilities" (pp. 329–330) but if ever I forget to be humble, my students will be quick to point out the error of my ways. When I was first starting out in teaching I could be rather bossy. I was setting up for a rehearsal with a new crew of students I hadn't worked with before. I was calling orders—place that there, pick this up, put that there, quickly now, we've got to get started and so on. Students were flying everywhere. Then I said, "The floor has to be swept." That techies have to learn how to *push the broom* before they work the lights is an important lesson in technical production. The safety of the stage is more important than the lights one shines

on it. But, my bedside manner left a little to be desired. I looked at a tall student I didn't know very well and said, "Here's a broom, away you go." I was about to walk away when I heard, "Say please!" I turned to face this very tall student looking down at me, but straight in the eye. I was so taken aback, I muttered, "…what?" He towered over me, but he wasn't threatening and said again, "Say please." With a real sense of shame, I said, "Oh yes… of course… please. Could you sweep up the stage, please?" He was absolutely right and he taught me one of the greatest lessons of my life that day. I always appreciated the work of my students, especially their extracurricular efforts, but I didn't let them know near enough times how appreciated they were. I've not ever missed thanking my students for their efforts and saying please since. I even thank my students for handing their essays in for marking. A lesson taught by a student and a lesson learned by a teacher—reflection-in-action at its best—and I continue to reflect on this significant and fundamental lesson today.

I am ever humbled and awed and inspired by the people and creatures I share this life with. That I may in some small way make a difference in their lives is a privilege, a responsibility and a quest. Philip Phenix describes the potential that human character has to evolve and grow and change as "idealization." The word "ideal" by definition denotes a standard that only exists as an idea and is, therefore, realistically unattainable by mere mortals. However, Phenix suggests that what is truly ideal in the existence of humankind is the capacity we have to conceive ideals and then pursue them to our hearts' content. Ideals themselves are the standards for which we strive, but it is in their pursuit that we learn, become aware and achieve enriched levels of consciousness and cognizance.

"Every end realized becomes the means for the fulfillment of further projected ideals" (Phenix, 1976, pp. 324–325).

As a person and teacher I've not ever been interested in attaining a plateau to remain for any more than the time it takes to appreciate its wonder, its lessons and its potentials. As does the Joker, I have not sought the ideal state of being nor attempted perfection at any level. I simply want to be a better person and a better teacher today than I was yesterday, but I haven't conceived in my mind any ideal personage or teacher I'd like to be, ultimately. To achieve the ultimate ideal, whether in career or knowledge or understanding or feeling or existence, would be to deny the "infinitude" described by Philip Phenix. "Infinitude expresses the never-finished enlargement of contexts within which every bounded entity is enmeshed" (1976, p. 324). In essence, the reality of life is that human beings naturally evolve continuously in all aspects of their lives and cannot stop change whether they want to or not. To embrace change as an asset and as the natural state of human experience is to embody the spirit of transcendence, "the property of limitless going beyond" (p. 325).

> I have tried very hard to encourage my students to go beyond the limits placed upon them or they place upon themselves to discover new or latent potentials, abilities, talents and powers they have not known in themselves before. While trying to enrich their lives through drama, theatre, literature, music, my woodworking, travel, historical interpretation, cross-cultural activities, photography, painting and, of course, teaching, I've experienced and witnessed their transcendence of overwhelming odds and every conceivable daunting task, intolerance, inhibitor, psychological defence mechanism, of every trained

response, social pressure, emotional stressor, and of every creative block, artistic temperament, physical barrier or foible know to humankind to attain higher ground; to attain "the consciousness of limitless possibility" (Phenix, 1976, p. 327). For them the *experienced advisor, the devil's advocate, the gracious host, the friendly moderator, the informed shaman and the trickster cracking jokes all at one and the same time*—their muse, became an important influence in their lives. If only for a moment in time they looked beyond the ends of their noses to see themselves inside out and upside down and they liked what they saw and especially, what they felt. I love that." (Berezan, 2000, p. 9)

Chapter 3

Possible Problematics

During the research phase of this study, I encountered seven problematic areas of concern that influenced the data collected directly or affected the way performances went which indirectly influenced the data. "Often, situations are problematic in several ways at once" (Schon, 1987, p. 6). I don't think any of the problematics adversely affected the richness, quality, and accuracy of the data—in fact, they brought me to a deeper understanding of jokering from angles I had not foreseen. The impact of these problematics on the discovery process is more than palpable, so I bring them into the thesis here for the reader to assess and for me to *reflect* upon one more time before moving to the conclusion of this investigation. Avoiding leading questions as the interviewer, the stresses elicited when *play* is not free, the limitations to the players' tolerances, the egocentric nature of acting, the political culture existing within and without the target community, *smashing* the mirror and the Joker's potential bias in making spontaneous decisions are the seven problematics that I will consider at this point.

"Qualitative research design decisions parallel the warm-up, exercise, and cool-down periods of the dance. Just as dance mirrors and creates life, so too do research designs adapt, change, and meld the very phenomena they are intended to examine" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. xvii). The Joker and the actors were briefed and quite aware of the intent and focus of my research prior to setting out on tour in May of 2002. They had received a list of questions (see Appendix B) ahead of their interviews from which they could choose a jumping off point for the interview. However, I did not write my

research question into the list. I wanted to approach the concept of a Joker in the classroom more subtly by encouraging their reflection upon the idea without defining or even establishing the link before hand. All interviews with the Joker and with the cast members were structured in that the focus of the research was clearly stated and the list of possible questions framed and related to that focus, but each interview was conducted in the conversational, improvisational style of the theatre company. The interviews became an exploration of ideas and concepts rather of specific answers to specific questions and allowed the possibility for insights otherwise left tacit to come to the fore spontaneously. At least this was the intention and the hope.

Because they were so focussed on how they could productively work the mirror to the advantage of the target audiences we were interacting with, they tended to speak about Joker in the theatre rather than the classroom. While I needed each actor as a teacher in training or in practice to broach the interrelationship between jokering in the theatre and teaching in the classroom during the interview, I did not wish to ask leading questions that might ensure some sort of direct answer to my research question that could interfere with the sincerity of their responses. In this study I wanted to discover the essences of jokering and its application to all teaching practice, not just to that of a drama teacher or a teacher using drama in his or her classroom to enhance lessons in another subject area. As an English teacher I might not use drama at all (although as a drama teacher as well I can hardly resist), but I still joker the lessons because ultimately, it is my contention that jokering can take place in any classroom and become the practice of any teacher without the drama.

DHKB: Well, umm, can you see this… you mentioned how the jokering in the classroom, or teaching as jokering is more subtle and you have a greater chance to develop a

> comfort level before you start drawing people out and that kind of thing... (H., Personal Communication, May 10 2002)

In this case the actor had initiated the conversation about jokering in the classroom earlier in the interview and then, interrupted my fumbling attempt to set up the question before I had to ask it. The actor enthusiastically moved the conversation on about jokering and teaching without much prompting. Then, I asked:

> DHKB: Umm, how close do you think jokering is to teaching and vice versa? Because obviously the centre of my research is to try and find out those qualities within the jokering, or within the Joker, that would inform and enhance teaching. Any thoughts on that? (DHKB/J., Personal Communication, May 9, 2002)

Here, I was less than subtle. The interview was going well, but it did not seem that in the time allotted we would ever get onto jokering in the classroom. The actor moved on with the conversation without hesitation, taking the obvious and clumsy redirect in stride, as the actor would incorporate a dramatic idea suggested by the audience on stage. Terrific improvisational technique.

Another actor chose from the list the questions, "Are you an educator? What do you see in the Joker that can be adapted in your own classroom?" The actor responded with, "Oh, I definitely think the Joker is a teacher. The Joker really makes us look at who we are, how we behave towards other people, how we treat other people and things that we say" (G., Personal Communication, May 9, 2002). I asked another actor:

> DHKB: Umm, okay, let's not see the teacher as in the classic sense. Maybe, are there things that the Joker does that could make teaching more [reflective] in the classroom? (DHKB/M., Personal Communication, May 8, 2002)

Again, the actor initiated the conversation about teaching prior to this question and then all I had to do is centre this part of the interview on the heart of the matter I wanted to know more about. This actor, M, responded with, "Oh yeah!" and the following ensued.

> M: In terms of that, absolutely, because a lot of the questions that…or how [The Joker] approaches the questioning and the facilitating and the listening and the

talking…I mean, that's what you wanna get in your classroom. You notice that in jokering lots of people have their hands up. And even kids who said they wouldn't participate have hands up and they have something to say. So, it's that style: creating that synergy as well.

DHKB: [The Joker] uses the word 'conversation' with the audience and of course it involves the actors and the audience in that conversation. What does that mean, 'conversation', to you?

M: Umm, I think of it just as a sharing of ideas and creating a dialogue. I think it's also about listening though, as well as talking because we can talk 'til we're all blue in the face but if we're not, if we're not listening then we probably won't get too far, as well.

DHKB: And is there some connection there do you think for regular classroom teaching?

M: I think so, but it's also sensing what's going on, on another level as well. Just seeing where people are at and how people are responding to things. It's also a part of that conversation.

DHKB: Alright, what else…you had some other notes there. What else? Let's pursue things that came to mind.

M: Umm, oh, actually one of these you asked… 'are you an educator?'. (*Laughing*) I guess I am, yes. 'What do you see in the Joker that can be adapted in your own classroom?' I know for myself, sometimes I ask questions that are too complicated, the students or the teacher for that matter are not ready for that question so I have to kind of backtrack and reframe it. I asked "what would you do if…" (M., Personal Communication, May 8, 2002)

The questioning here seems to invite candid responses about teaching, jokering and reflection-in-action. I tried a number of questions and approaches to avoid leading the question. Here's another:

DHKB: We're obviously in theatre in education here. Umm, there is something to be taught, maybe not a specific lesson that has a specific answer that you take away, but there's something being taught. Is the Joker a teacher? (DHKB/S., Personal Communication, May 8, 2002)

Well, not great, but the question stimulated over a page of transcript on this topic of Joker as teacher mostly spoken by the actor himself. The question was less subtle, but it did not dictate any particular answer. This is the actor that took us into the Social Studies

classroom to explain how the actor used jokering in practice. Here is part of what the actor had to say:

> S: I think in the show, we're all teachers. The Joker's a teacher, the cast are teachers, and the audience themselves—one audience member to another is a teacher telling/saying this is what should happen or this is what I like to see happen or this is what I would do. Trying to teach others the difference between right and wrong. Trying to teach what kinds of choices you should make. Trying to teach [without] trying to preach the right choices, but just to consider [what] the right choices are. (S., Personal Communication, May 8, 2002)

T presented a marvellous analysis of jokering, arriving at "intuition and practice" as the most significant aspects of jokering and I asked, "And are those skills that teachers need?" Here, I hoped I was at my subtle best. T said in response, "For sure, for sure" (T., Personal Communication, May 9, 2002) and further expressed thoughts on the matter for a half page of transcript, parts of which I've already included above. As a person involved in teaching, acting and jokering, the actor had spent some time reflecting upon and contemplating the correlation between jokering and teaching.

"Questions, however can be controlling and I try to be cautious about leading questions" (Norris, 2002, p. 9). I obviously influenced the direction of the interviews with my questioning, but however gauche I might have been at times I don't think I controlled the answers or the outcomes in any way in the interviews, which, of course, was my hope and intent. I trust my self-conscious awareness of the importance of creating questions of inquiry rather than of foregone conclusions and pat answers, and my constant vigilance in *inviting* the interviewees to share their understandings, experiences and knowledge rather than expecting particular proofs of my contentions helped the validation of the data.

The second problematic relates to an experience I had as Joker when I was unable to place pride before purpose. While jokering *In-between* in the first show of the data collection phase I had cause to reflect upon my jokering and to regret a choice I made in

the heat of the dance when I found myself playing for the laugh rather than for the audience.

Joker: So, comments about anything you've seen or any of the scenes in particular? We started with *Going to the Prom*, then to *Parental Roles*, the scene where the mother has decided to be a traditional housewife. Then, the differences in culture, and the supervisory cousin that is to accompany the son out on a night on the town. Then, we had the gang scene and just as a note, the final part of that scene illustrates a trait of certain gangs. Often it is the leader's girl who is left holding the bag; that is her role—to diffuse the situation with police, be very uncooperative and take the rap in the end if she has to. This female role is peculiar to [particular] gangs, for example. Then, we finished off with the newscast. There were several problems there?

A1: Huge problems.

(*Laughter.*)

Joker: Any particular scene you'd like to take a look at again? What can we do with it to change it? Which one would you like to look at? Yes, A2, go ahead.

A2: I'd just like to look at the whole issue of moms that stay at home.

Joker: Yes? Okay, lets get that scene set up.

I: Oh, I hate this one.

(*Laughter throughout.*)

Joker: Yes, this is the one 'I' had such difficulty getting through.

A3: I was going to say… perfect typecasting!

(*Laughter throughout again.*)

Joker: We need the chairs reset. Okay. I suppose we could say that this is a traditional family, but it wouldn't be considered so common anymore except maybe in cultures where the male and female roles are very well defined. What should we do with this scene? A2? You have a suggestion for this scene?

A2: It's kind of a hot topic. If you stay at home, you've sold out and if you go out to work, you've sold out. It's sort of a no-win situation for women these days because they're expected to stay home, but they're also expected to work. And I think the role of women has changed a lot.

Joker: Before there may have been a lot of pressure to stay at home…

A2: The grandmother traditionally did a lot of the care giving so that the woman could do some work, but we do not have that in our society anymore. The

grandmother is retiring and maybe not living in the same city. There's a lot emphasis on the woman in the home.

Joker: Hmmmmnnn…

A4: I guess for me that comes with it and knowing when you were writing the show that at one level I saw this as "been there, done that—we're over that now," but your research was showing that there are cultural groups that still very strongly subscribe to this belief.

Joker: Yes, exactly.

A5: Well, I think what's problematic with this scene is that it is being played to reinforce a [negative attitude] toward women who choose to remain at home. The scene suggests that a woman must decide between a career and the home. I'm a doctoral student and will still choose to remain home with my baby when he or she is born. This scene reinforces the split between staying at home or going out to work, but the reality is that many women do both.

Joker: Hmm, yes, it's intended to be, so people like you will make wonderful suggestions as you've just done.

(*Laughter.*)

Joker: It's suppose to irritate ya. I told you the scenes can be annoying.

(*Laughter.*) (Video Transcript, *In-Between*, April 10 show of this Mirror Theatre Tour)

When I went for the laugh instead of facing the reality that parts of the scene were inappropriate and could be interpreted by this particular audience as a slight upon the good character of women, I smashed the mirror for the very first time as a Joker. My skills in reflection-in-action failed me here. I didn't know it then, but I do now. I'll tell about another time I "broke" the mirror later in this paper. The first rule of acting and jokering is know your audience and I did for the most part know the audience very well in this show, but in that moment I took a defensive posture and stuck up for the scene and the play we had created rather than the audience member. I really regret my lapse of judgement and for a brief, but painful few moments the play no longer reflected the audience and interplay became restricted and contrived as I tried to recover my jokering sensibilities. I recollected my thoughts and dug down deep into my performer's acumen

and recovered the free play. The jokering played out in the end as I hoped it would, but the lady had a point and I should have taken her protest more seriously and rewrote the scene right there and then without covering its inappropriate nature with laughter. I don't think the data was skewed negatively. In fact, this incident was probably one of the most revealing moments of the data collection process. "The nature of all art, as Hegel formulated it, is that it 'presents man with himself'" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 48). Boy, did it ever!

A third problematic presented itself when people tired of the work and demands of Theatre in Education. Though the pedagogical nature of jokering has been the inspiration to an entire research study and thesis, I did not find every moment of the process a bed of roses, as it were. There were moments for the actors, the Joker and myself when perhaps the last thing we felt like doing was presenting another performance workshop. I believe strongly in the objectives and work of the company and in the importance of my research to my own professional and personal development, but life on the road and playing to ever-needy audiences show after show is a gruelling undertaking. After arriving at the venue where we'd spend the next week dealing with issues of concern to the community, we set up the set pieces, lighting and sound, preset props and the audio-visual equipment for data collection and finalized the scene line-up for the morning show. It had been a long day of travel and with the physical exertion of packing and setting up, we were all ready for a break, but the Joker decided we needed another rehearsal. No one in the cast said anything to the contrary, but the body language and the fidgeting while the Joker introduced what he wanted out of this run spoke volumes about what they thought of having to rehearse late into the evening after a long day, the night

before an early morning opening performance. I must admit, I wasn't too keen on starting the video tape recordings and continuing my field notes that evening either; however, we sucked it up and went for it. The rehearsal went well and, of course, the Joker's call was right. I was able to resume one of the most significant events in my entire life and career, the data collection phase of my Master's Degree, and the actors became familiar with the stage area vocally and spatially and tightened up the show ready for the next morning. But our initial reaction to extra rehearsal and the energy it would demand of us was far from the foundational essences of jokering and teaching.

Another distressing aspect of the rehearsal that evening was the Joker's decision to allow the welcoming committee to sit in on the rehearsal. A very Brechtian approach where the audience can comment on the effectiveness of the performance in rehearsal, but incredibly difficult to deal with for actors wanting the time away from the audience to work on the best they can be for the show. "You cannot set drama, or worse, coerce groups into it. A group has to move to a point where they are willing at a subjective level of involvement in open-ended pretending situations. Drama requires forms of negotiation that allow for some bargaining between the teacher and the group, as to the nature and content of the work" (Neelands, 1984, p. 24). The Joker's negotiating skills were in top form that night, otherwise a protest may have been raised. He did hear the "voice" of protest the next morning when the same welcoming committee was allowed into the theatre during the warm-up before the show. Actors are quite averse to having to share their personal and collective space and being on stage every second of the time they're in the theatre. They needed a break from the audience however altruistic their intentions might have been. The data I collected that night illustrated the need to remain grounded

in reality revealed—we're all human beings and though the goal is to help others, we have our own needs and require time to take care of ourselves.

A fourth problematic reflects and reveals the egocentric nature of acting. As previously discussed, the actor's inclination is to be seen and remembered for the quality of acting that actor has performed in a particular well-prepared role and to be thwarted at every attempt to generate this impact can be deeply dissatisfying. Because the Joker can interrupt the action at any point in an effort to move the show forward and further the conversation about the issues targeted, an actor can get half a line into a role and be frozen into inactivity and never have the occasion to get back into role and play out a scene. As an actor in the company, I've experienced this frustration numerous times and each time I felt somewhat unnerved and quite unfulfilled personally and artistically. I prefer Stanislavski's System where I can be "one with the character" and use the imaginary "fourth wall" as a barrier to interruptions that might keep an audience engaged in my characterization. Of course, this is antithetical to the needs and purposes of Theatre in Education and I've chosen to participate in an enterprise where my acting is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. During the research phase of my study, however, I did not work as an actor in the company so I don't think this sort of frustration entered the data collection process. I did empathize with other actors in their artistic endeavours, but I don't think this empathy skewed the data one way or the other.

When we were on tour we arrived in a community that had been hit with one of the unsuccessful piecemeal teacher strikes that were taking place here and there across the province, which brings me to the fifth problematic I encountered. In 2002, the Alberta Teachers' Association conducted teacher strikes that only took teachers out of schools

and onto picket lines in certain target areas. Not only was the ire of certain segments of the public raised to fever pitch, teachers and school boards in the target areas on strike resented their having to lose money, reputation and school time for students while other colleagues continued blissfully on without sacrifice. The political climate in school and out was not, to say the least, entirely positive, so the organizers were facing disapproval from within and without toward another interruption in the coursework of students. Some viewed the company as just another unnecessary intrusion in an already disjointed school year. The performance I jokered during the tour was with a single senior boys phys. ed. class that only came to the show because the teacher said they could earn participation points as part of their coursework. That was a tough show to joker and became problematic in its negative impact on my view of jokering. It caused me to rethink, reflect and review my interpretation of the data. Being the Joker for that one show felt more like torture than giving it up for a worthy cause.

This was also the show in which I "broke" the mirror again, which represents the sixth problematic to arise during the research phase. I have been very upfront and clear with the cast and the Joker that I had no interest in becoming a Joker in the theatre. I love the acting, the interaction, the writing and the co-direction and I highly respect the collective aspirations of the group, but I'd rather be a Joker in the classroom than a Joker in the theatre. I aspire to be a Joker in my classroom and the data analysis of jokering has helped me to reflect upon and understand my motivations and why I teach the way I do, but jokering a Theatre in Education company is not for me. So, when I faced off with the most difficult audience I had encountered in my experience, I wondered what the heck I was doing there. I couldn't seem to pass the puck, as it were. This next excerpt begins

part way through an interview I had with the Joker following this performance: The Joker is responding to the frustrations I had expressed about jokering with this particular group:

Joker: I know part of it was trying to pull them, okay. And this is my law, I'm not saying it's an absolute law, but it's the one that I really hold close. But on the next page, on the back sheet of the paper, I said, "you broke the mirror." It ceased to be Mirror Theatre when the question was asked, "When you were in Grade 10…?" The mirror works when they don't ever have to say when they were in Grade 10. The play is when they were in Grade 10 but they're talking about the play. Mirror Theatre works indirectly. When we move into the discussion groups we do say, "when you're in Grade 10, what are you experiencing now… in the small intimate discussion groups. What I try to do in the larger group is keep the mirror and not ask them for personal disclosure at that particular point.

DHKB: I don't understand how the mirror was broken.

Joker: Okay. "Does anyone have an experience that they'd like to tell?" Okay, and "K" asked, "how old are you?"

DHKB: Ahh.

Joker: All of that was now moving [away from the mirror]. We weren't talking about the scenes on the stage.

DHKB: But we were trying to draw them out, right?

Joker: I know, yeah. I'll draw them out, but I'll draw them out by commenting about the scenes. I won't draw them out by having them comment about their lives. Although they are commenting about their lives in the scenes. The mirror is intact. When I say, "there" it becomes… when I was in school there was a bully… let's try that scene up on the stage. Now we've broken the mirror. That's a different form of theatre.

DHKB: And my impression of that was that's a really good idea.

Joker: I don't. [Because] it can become quite self-indulgent. None of the groups we've met are forum theatre. And I've seen forum theatre go into the classrooms and muck around with people. I want to keep the mirror. "Let's talk about these things. Yes, you'll bring your own lives into these scenes." The focus is we're talking about these scenes. There's a degree of protection here.

DHKB: Yeah, exactly.

Joker: That's coming clearer, isn't it?

DHKB: Oh, absolutely.

Joker: Really interesting. So, I'm really enjoying this because it is, I think, nicely pulling things together. Now, and this is another one and this is again my

> juxtaposition. It all comes down to my underpinning philosophy of all the work... and you've helped articulate that really nicely.

Because I felt this group was a non-starter and that my efforts would be in vain, I did not fully commit to the process or the audience. In direct contradiction of all the essences of jokering, I did something I'd try to avoid doing in my classroom. Students have, over the years, revealed countless personal fears, losses, uncertainties and cruel circumstances, but I've not ever placed these private disclosures in the public domain. I try very hard to be a sincere listener, a good friend and a helpful mediator, but I was overcome by the pressures of the stage in a way I'd not really experienced before. I've been a performer all my life, as a singer, drummer, actor, director, emcee, voice-over actor and teacher, but jokering in the theatre in front of a class that really didn't want to be there and I hadn't the time to get to know threw me for a loop. It was the worst of times because I didn't rise to the occasion as I normally would and it was the best of times because I learned a lot about myself, I gained an important insight into how jokering works and I realized why it was I had no desire to become Joker in any theatre company.

The company enters the theatre, initially, with the authority invested in the Joker by the sponsoring group and the attention given by an audience curious about the dramatic strangers in school, but to sustain the interest of the audience and to establish rapport, a working relationship and that crucial sense of trust with the audience, the Joker must work very hard, indeed. If an audience is "difficult," the Joker does not have the luxury of time or backup or the authority of the school to rely on. The Joker has to draw the audience into a reflective, but creative analysis and understanding of their concerns, ideas, fears, suggestions and any possibility of affecting the audience positively can only come from establishing an immediate relationship with the audience. The audience must

sense that the Joker cares about them and that the Joker can be trusted to involve them in the play without fear of ridicule or embarrassment or pressure all within a two hour performance/workshop. So much depends on the Joker getting it right on the spot because there is no second chance to work with the group again. In a lot of ways, the first day teaching a class is a similar experience. The most important class of the term is the first one and I prepare hardest for this initial lesson with each of my classes. What is established with my class regarding expectations and rules and the demands of coursework sets the tone for the entire course. Most classes pay very close attention that first day because they wouldn't dare do otherwise. This advantage the Joker does not have. Some audiences fear anything to do with interactive theatre and individual participants can be so "freaked out" or hostile that the Joker's hands are full before the audience is completely seated in the theatre. My jokering really starts the next class period and I am comforted by the fact that I have many lessons to conduct, plan and integrate my jokering into the classroom with my class.

The spontaneous inspiration and improvisation practiced by the Joker that responds to the immediate and long-term needs of the audience is part and parcel of teaching practice as well. I'm not one to repeat a lesson verbatim nor am I one to adhere to a lesson plan that isn't working for a class. There are a thousand and one ways to fulfil the objectives of any course and most of them must be invented or adapted from course guides by the teacher based on the specific and unique needs of a particular group of students. And yes, it is necessary at times to *wing it* if the planned approach to the lesson would confuse students or inhibit the long-term accomplishment of a course objective. If a lesson does go horribly wrong, I can as a classroom teacher, take the next lesson to put

things right. The Joker, as a performer in live theatre, does not have this kind of time. And the Joker lacks the support of parental demands, diploma requirements, grading incentives, participation requirements, discipline policies, phone calls home, trips to the office, counselling services, social expectations, administrative directives, department heads or colleagues working in the same discipline. When I am in the theatre, as a performer and drama teacher, acting, singing, drumming, directing school productions or designing the technical production needs of a show my priority is artistic development rather than social change. I may influence the social consciousness of the students, audiences and colleagues I work with, but I needn't accomplish this effect in a couple of hours or at all. One of the actors in interview commented on the advantages of the classroom setting in this way:

> DHKB: You mentioned how the jokering in the classroom is more subtle and you have a greater chance to develop a comfort level before you start drawing people out.
>
> H: But it's also assumed, almost, that you are teacher. Therefore, at any grade your kids are still going to see you in the role of the teacher. And so you are already at a level of assumed trust in a lot of cases. But you already have a designed relationship with them. You don't have to spend a lot of time building trust with them before you can start jokering. Because I think one of the things students expect is to be challenged but if you choose to kind of joker as a teacher I don't think your kids are going to really think that differently [of you]. I don't think they're going to [say], "oh, he's not teaching us. (H., Personal Communication, May 10, 2002)

I didn't know when I started this inquiry that I would discover jokering in the classroom would be in so many ways different than in the theatre. The data reveal that the essences of jokering are the same, but I know now that a Joker in the classroom is an artist in his or her own right; in my case informed by theatre, but functioning in a very different environment psychologically, socially, artistically, emotionally and pedagogically than the Joker in the theatre. The circumstances and dynamics of the jokering are very different in the classroom than they are on stage. For me the

preconceived notions of what theatre is, the fear that audience participation places in the hearts of an audience and the pressures of performance get in the way of jokering. That's not to take anything away from Theatre in Education or the wonderful work this company does. I wish to continue my participation in the company into perpetuity, but not as Joker. This realization influenced the data collection in that I asked questions and gathered information that pointed to the differences between jokering in the theatre and jokering in the classroom. However, in the process, I gained an essential insight into jokering and what drives the work of a Joker in the classroom forward.

The seventh problematic I encountered in this study involves the bias inherent in the jokering process:

> As Joker, I find all my actions problematic. Every comment I make is based upon my own bias and comfort level. At the same time, I don't want to overly control. I trust students and appreciate their struggles, so I listen to them trying to assist them in working issues through. But since they are in process, many ideas are roughly formed and articulated. I read the audience, including the teachers and students, trying to determine the community's level of comfort. As Joker, I am making many decisions that 'try' to keep the conversation open and forward moving, recognizing the complexity of the work that I do. (Norris, 2002, p. 15)

The Joker's motivations are considerate and compassionate, but they're certainly not impartial. The Joker makes informed artistic, logistic and realistic decisions spontaneously on stage that affect the direction of the play, the way issues will be dealt with, what suggestions will be incorporated into the improvisational text of the scenes and the short and long outcomes of the performance/workshop. Personal biases,

preferences, comfort level, priorities and choices come into play as part of the Joker's work. The Joker is mindful, thoughtful and watchful of his effect on the audience, but the choices made on stage obviously affected the data that was recorded, collected and analyzed in this study.

I believe the problematics encountered in the collection and analysis phases affected the data by forcing deeper investigation and inspiring new insights into the essences of jokering. "Like art, literature, poetry and music, qualitative accounts of the drama of teaching [jokering] and learning can have profound and unpredictable effects on human thought and action" (Clark, 1990, p. 337). I did wish to see and sense the jokering from both sides of the mirror, but I also discovered levels of meaning beneath, above, behind and at a distance from the mirror.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

In this inquiry I've investigated, analyzed, studied and restudied jokering in Mirror Theatre and the Joker-like qualities that may reflect, inform, influence and inspire a reflective teaching practice. Changes that occur as a result of the work of this company may influence or inspire change in a single individual in an audience, a whole school class or no one at all.

> As for myself, the moment that made this conference unlike other such events was when an improvisational theatre group under the title, *ReSearch RePlay*, and the direction of [the Joker] presented a series of impressions of what some of the substance of the conference had been. There were tears in my eyes and I am not an overly emotional man. They walked the talk, as did most of the people I met. (Dean, 2000, p. 1)

In my experience, emotive, thoughtful and reflective experiences like these are not uncommon amongst the participants and it is the Joker with the help of the cast of teacher-actors that facilitates and inspires these impressions.

"The qualitative researcher is very much like an artist at various stages in the design process, in terms of situating and recontextualizing the research project within the shared experience of the researcher and the participants" (Janesick, 1998, p. 37). I've tried to develop a dramatic research design and utilized the reflexive and qualitative methodology of Theatre in Education to embark upon a voyage of discovery in the good ship *Mirror Theatre* captained by the Joker, which conveyed me through unknown inlets of surprising beauty and depth, vast fjords of pedagogical insight, out to sea to be driven

by the epistemological winds of meaning making and knowledge and back into unique ports of reflective study from which I could set out to explore revealing passages of text integral to my inquiry. "Artistic research provides ways for us to set out and chart our journeys into the exotic territories of the marvellous and the uncanny" (Diamond & Mullen, 1999, p. 44) and though I set out on this journey into uncharted waters with an investigative direction clearly in mind as set by my research question, the ship sailed to points I hadn't anticipated—a true journey of discovery in which I wasn't always sure where I was going, but I trust I found many informative ways to get there.

Through the juxtaposition of my practice with that of the Joker of Mirror Theatre I have learned that teaching is best when the Joker is responsive to the immediate needs of the audience… the students in my case, which demands and commands much more of the professional in the field than curriculum guides, course outlines and quality lesson plans can provide. As with the Joker, my responsiveness to the immediate needs of those I teach requires caring and thoughtfulness and all the other essences I've discovered in this study if I'm to be the kind of teacher I've always tried to be… an onerous task, an all-consuming responsibility, but for me, the only way I can attempt to be the kind of teacher and Joker I want and need to be. I entered a drama class the other day with clear objectives in mind, at least one thousand and one potential approaches at my disposal and a lesson plan regarding Stanislavski's acting *System* in hand, but still uncertain of exactly what it would be that bridged the knowledge gap between superficiality and naturalism in acting. I started the class with a stretching and movement warm-up to music. The music wasn't arbitrarily chosen, but its effect on the students in the way they moved and responded to the mood, intensity and emotions suggested by the music gave me an idea.

To be natural in a role, one must become the character. In the warm-up, the students became an extension of the music—essentially they became the music. From here they could be drawn into depths of characterization emotionally and knowledgeably through music, movement and guided imagery, so, the lesson took on this tact, approach and redirection and the plan evolved from there. They became numerous characters living emotionally and naturally moments of their lives with the music as a background soundtrack. I responded to what they gave me spontaneously and jokered them through a series of exercises, mostly revised or devised on the spot, to draw them into the knowledge of acting as Stanislavski would have expected.

Education must be an avenue to personal fulfillment, not just a way to get a job. No one should live a lifetime and then discover that they need to "get a life." The richness of a student's future depends on an educational process that first recognizes individual personality and then engages the student in learning experiences that draw forth, exercise and challenge that personality. The cogwheels of economy, politics and socialization will present themselves and turn with or without an educated public. But if our world is to achieve and aspire to more, we must rely upon well-rounded and confident personalities.

"The natural laws of teaching are, like anything else, a matter of interpretation" (Eisner, 1994, p. 306) and so too are the epistemological, pedagogical and phenomenological claims of this thesis. "But possibly you will come to quite a different conclusion. To which I am the last person to object" (Brecht, 1978, p. 19). I believe the linkages between jokering and teaching practice are viable and valid and I hope there is something in this thesis that will intrigue, if not inspire. Education affects the very hearts,

minds, bodies and souls of the people we teach and a self-reflective practice is essential to fulfilling this responsibility. The essences of jokering do powerfully inform, reinforce, inspire, correlate, engage and contribute to any quality I might have achieved in my teaching practice. My experiences with the Joker and actors of Mirror Theatre and with the many other Jokers who have contributed to this study have enabled me to reflect on my own teaching and the important role of jokering in the classroom. This publication is now open to your perusal, analysis and reflection. "Making research public is the best way of getting it validated. It indicates that you have nothing to hide and are willing for others to scrutinize what has happened to help you move your thinking forward" (McNiff, 1998, p. 26).

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Appendix A

Mirror Theatre:

Mirror Theatre, a registered not-for-profit society, is a Theatre in Education (TIE) company, which writes and performs plays and conducts workshops dealing with social issues. They are dedicated to the improvement of the human condition and base their plays on research, which uncovers how people define their present life situations. The insights collected are translated into a series of vignettes, which are brought to an audience for their consideration. The presentations, however, do not preach; the theatrical medium reflects life as others define it. Hence the name, 'Mirror Theatre'.

The company believes that the audience must not remain passive but become actively engaged in defining and changing their own present situations. Through audience participation and workshops following the performance, the audience, along with the teacher-actors, create new scenes based upon their own interests and beliefs. Through the comparison of one's beliefs with the beliefs of others a better understanding of our lives together can be achieved.

Mirror Theatre is presently under the artistic direction of Dr. Joe Norris, Director of Education at the Washington State University. Besides being committed to theatre as an art form, he believes that drama is also a powerful learning medium and instrument of social change. The teacher-actors are made up of a wide range of individuals, most of whom are or have been Bachelor of Education students in Drama Education. They adopt the motto, "I hear, and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." Consequently they merge their acting abilities with their teaching abilities to create a program, which is informative, entertaining and educational.

Dr. Joe Norris, Director
Mirror Theatre[9]

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[9]Mirror Theatre Promotional Preamble (see Appendix 1 for more details). The brackets are mine.

Appendix B

A Joker in the Classroom

by David H. K. Berezan
Graduate Student at the University of Alberta

Data Collection Phase: May 8th Through 17th 2002

Cast Member Interview Questionnaire

Part One: ***Permission to Interview and to Publish Data Collected in the Interview***

Prior to Recording:

I, David H. K. Berezan, would like to interview you regarding Mirror Theatre's play, *Coulda Shoulda*. As you know, I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta working on my Master's Degree in Drama Education and I am studying the role of the *Joker*, the character that enters at the end of the play to engage the audience and cast in a conversation about the issues raised in the play. This interview is not a critique of Joe as Joker or of his jokering and this is not a critique of the acting within a Mirror Theatre presentation. I am researching the correlation between the methods and abilities of the Joker and effective teaching in any classroom. The working title of my thesis is *A Joker in the Classroom*. Do you agree to be interviewed as part of the data collection process for David H. K. Berezan's Master's Degree and thesis?

_____ Yes _____ No Signature: _____

I, David H.K. Berezan, request your permission to tape-record, transcribe, utilize and disseminate information that I gather in this interview for my thesis, which will be published and available to the public. You will be referred to in the thesis anonymously and nowhere in the thesis will your actual name appear. Do you grant your permission for this recorded interview to proceed?

_____ Yes _____ No Signature: _____

You do not have to answer all of the questions asked in this interview. If you wish not to answer a particular question, please indicate your wishes to the interviewer. Do you understand that answering or not answering questions asked is your prerogative?

_____ Yes _____ No Signature: _____

Part Two: ***The Interview***

Recording Begins (After instructions completed and appropriate permission is granted):

Interviewer: "The tape-recorder is running. You have agreed to participate in this interview as part of the data collection process for David H. K. Berezan's Master's thesis research and you have given your permission to record this interview. Is that correct? Thank you very much for helping me with my research. I'm going to ask you a number of questions about your experience of the *jokering* in Mirror Theatre's presentation of *Coulda, Shoulda (or Fair Play Rulz).* Is that okay?

- When Joe is jokering a scene how does he assist you and others in the cast in creating the new scene?
- How much did Joe structure the jokering and how much of the "simultaneous dramaturgy" is left to the cast and audience in developing the improvisation.
- In this play what is the most important issue to you?
- Can you describe your experience when Joe made a suggestion about how to do a scene?
- Just as you got started on the new scene as suggested by the audience, Joe interrupted. How did this interruption make you feel?
- Do you prefer to work from a defined script or with the improvised script? Why?
- Joe will ask you "what are your inner thoughts." You answer as the character, but what are your inner thoughts as the actor in focus?
- Most plays end, the audience applauds and the show is over. Mirror Theatre doesn't stop working with the audience at the end of the play. Do you think this is an effective way to deal with the issues the play raises?
- Mirror Theatre is a TIE (Theatre in Education) company. What does that statement mean to you?
- Is the Joker a teacher?
- Are you an educator? What do you see in the Joker that can be adapted in your own classroom?
- When the actors say "that worked"[10] after the play and workshop, what "worked" exactly?
- Why is the Joker called the "Joker"?
- Mirror Theatre's mission statement is: Mirror Theatre is a Theatre in Education Company, which writes and performs plays and conducts workshops dealing with social issues. They are dedicated to the improvement of the human condition and base their plays on research, which uncovers how people define their present life situations. The insights collected are translated into a series of vignettes, which are brought to an audience for their consideration. The presentations, however, do not preach; the theatrical medium reflects life as others define it. Hence the name, 'Mirror Theatre'. What does this Mission statement mean to you?
- Is the role of the Joker important in learning from the play?
- What is learned in a Mirror Theatre presentation?

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[10] When people in drama or theatre or music say *that worked* or *that works* or *that really worked well for me*, they are referring to the synergism people experience intuitively and spontaneously when working with others in an artistic and creative endeavour, the kind of experience that people find difficult to put into words.

Is there anything else you'd like to say or bring up before this interview comes to an end?

Well, I'd like to thank you very much once again for helping with my research. I've enjoyed talking with you very much and you've been most helpful.

DHKB